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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE INFLUENCE OF CARE: AN EXPLORATION OF  
STUDENT AND TEACHER EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Allison Marie Schnell

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Teacher Education  
Educational Studies

May 2020

This Dissertation by: Allison Marie Schnell

Entitled: *The Influence of Care: An Exploration of Student and Teacher Experiences*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Teacher Education, Program of Educational Studies

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## ABSTRACT

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An exploration of caring relationships among students and teachers, what the relationships look like, and how the relationships impact teachers, students, and classroom culture is the focus of this portrayed case study. A constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist paradigm form the conceptual framework, both of which align with the theoretical frameworks of Attachment Theory, Care Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. The research questions focus on how care is enacted within the classroom setting, with a focus on one teacher and seven students within an alternative high school setting. Research questions guiding this research are: (a) What is the nature of caring student-teacher relationships? (b) How do teachers perceive caring student-teacher relationships to impact themselves and their students? and (c) How do students perceive caring from their teachers? Triangulation, the use of multiple cases, and member checking were used to ensure trustworthiness of this research. Findings suggested that *Understanding, Communicating, Helping, Listening, Being Present, Being Fair, and Showing Respect* were central to caring practice. This research offers important implications for teacher preparation programs, professional development opportunities offered to school leaders and teachers, school administrators, and teachers.

Key Words: *Attachment Theory, Case Study, Care Theory, Constructivist, Interpretivist, Portraiture, Self-Determination Theory, Student-Teacher Relationships*

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The camaraderie of my fellow colleagues guided me through this process. Having a support network of fellow students who were also working towards their

individual goals was invaluable. We shared so much through this process and their support and encouragement was much appreciated on a personal and professional level.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER

I.	INTRODUCTION	11
	Statement of Problem	
	Purpose of Study	
	Research Questions	
	Rationale of Study	
	Significance of Study	
	Theoretical Foundation	
	Definition of Terms	
II.	LITERATURE	24
	Introduction	
	Literature Review	
	Constructs of Caring and Relational Factors	
	Student Perspectives of Care and Relationships	
	Teacher Perspectives of Care and Relationships	
	Conceptual Framework	
III.	METHODOLOGY	39
	Introduction	
	Rationale	
	Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations	
	Research Setting	
	Researcher's Stance	
	Research Participants	
	Ethical Considerations	
	Data Collection	
	Data Analysis	
	Trustworthiness	
	Limitations and Delimitations	
IV.	FINDINGS	57
	Introduction	
	Setting	
	Ann	



The Students	
Emergent Themes	
Research Questions	
V.    DISCUSSION	115
Introduction	
Overview	
Findings and Implications	
Limitations	
Suggestions for Future Research	
REFERENCES	125
APPENDIX	
A. STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP SCALES	132
B. RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR TEACHERS	136
C. RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR STUDENTS	139
D. CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS	142
E. CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS	146
F. ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS	150
G. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	154
H. DISSERTATION TIMELINE	161
I. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVALS	163

## LIST OF TABLES

### Tables

1. Data Collection Timeline	50
2. Student Participants	78

## LIST OF FIGURES

### Figures

1. Egbert and Sanden (2014) Tree Diagram	34
2. Conceptual Framework	36
3. Student Celebration Board	62
4. Puzzle Corner	62
5. Classroom Expectations	63
6. Classroom Décor	64
7. Birthday Wall	65
8. Ann Black	67
9. Latina Cultural Day Craft	69
10. Scent Cabinet	70
11. Anthony	80
12. Hailey	84
13. Jafabian	88
14. Morgan	97
15. Ann and Morgan	98
16. Victoria	101

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of Problem**

As Nel Noddings (2005) asserts, “Schools cannot accomplish their academic goals without attending to the fundamental needs of students for continuity of care” (p. 63). Noddings has emphasized the ethics of care as a vehicle for the advancement of education and to cultivate essential relationships between students and teachers to meet the needs of the whole child. Positive, caring relationships between students and teachers have shown to be good predictors of long-term student success, enhancing social functioning, alleviating behavior problems, and increasing learning engagement in the classroom (Davis, 2003, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, Oort, 2011; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011; Teven & McCrosky, 1997; Teven, 2001). Caring relationships among teachers and students are essential components of the development of the whole child and have lasting impacts, reaching far beyond the school doors (Bosworth, 1995; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McFarland, Murray, & Phillipson, 2016; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Noddings, 1984, 2005; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Pianta et al., 1995; Quigley & Hall, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen, & et al., 2011; Teven & McCrosky, 1997).

McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) explored teacher-student relationships and their impact on students who were at-risk. Findings suggest at-risk students can greatly benefit from positive relationships with teachers, as student-teacher relationships may counteract

negativity in the child's life including adverse life events and poor parent-child relationships. "Having a positive relationship with a teacher is a powerful buffer..." (p. 14). McGrath and Van Bergen's focus on attachment theory sheds light on the importance of student attachment to teachers and how teachers can impact students simply by how they relate to them to counteract possible negative relationships they may experience at home. Teven, 2001, expanded on this idea when he said, "...a vital requisite to effective teaching is establishing a climate of warmth, understanding, and caring within the classroom" (p. 160). Additionally, McFarland, Murray et al. (2016) identified gender differences as factors within student-teacher relationships. They found, "Girls have a higher overall self-concept than boys, boys had more conflict with their teachers, whereas girls had closer relationships with their teachers, and girls had a more positive perception of their teachers and reported higher enjoyment than boys" (p. 19).

Spilt, Koomen, et al. (2011) studied the impact of teacher-student relationships on teacher wellbeing and concluded, "Consideration of teacher-student relationships as a core aspect of the teaching profession and provision of adequate professional support for teachers to enhance their relational pedagogy will contribute to emotional outcomes because good relationships between teachers and students are central to learning and instruction" (p. 470). Teven and McCrosky (1997) pointed to a need for further research to understand how teachers care for their students, as caring behaviors of the teacher have shown to increase student affective and perceived cognitive learning (Roorda, Koomen, et al., 2011).

The existing literature on student-teacher relationships remains sparse and is often one-sided, as it focuses on the students *or* the teachers instead of whole relationships

between students and teachers. There is a vast need for further research on caring relationships as they impact students and teachers, as the preliminary findings have shown positive outcomes for students. This study aimed to untangle caring relationships among students and teachers within an educational setting to understand how they are fostered and the impacts they may have on both students and teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Resting on the theoretical frameworks of Noddings' Care Theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), Bowlby's Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005), and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), I explored relationships among students and teachers and the impact of those relationships on students, teachers, and classroom culture. The ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 2005) as demonstrated within the classroom will be the focus of this qualitative, portrayed case study. Through the verbal and non-verbal interactions among students and teachers, collection of classroom artifacts, and observation of daily routines, I better understood how the ethic of care influences the actions, behaviors, and emotions of students and teachers and, on a larger scale, how care influenced student behavior, motivation, academic achievement, and determined the general culture of the classroom ecosystem.

### **Research Questions**

Employing case study and portraiture methodologies together, also referred to as *portrayed case study* methodology (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012) and viewing knowledge through a constructivist epistemological stance and an interpretivist paradigm, the research questions which guided this study are:

- Q1     What is the nature of caring student-teacher relationships?
- Q2     How do teachers perceive caring student-teacher relationships to impact themselves and their students?
- Q3     How do students perceive caring from their teachers?

The research questions set forth provide a focus on the characteristics of student-teacher relationships themselves, teacher perceptions of the relationships, and student perceptions of the relationships. I am specifically intrigued by the intricacies of the interactions among students and teachers and if the teacher and student perceptions of care are in alignment with one another and how those perceptions may influence student behavior and academic motivation. To address the questions, I examined artifacts such as lesson plans, student work, and other sources, conducted semi-structured interviews of the teacher and student participants, and observed raw interactions among the students and their teacher to glean insight into the relational aspect of the school experience.

### **Rationale of the Study**

“Teachers often take the role of being the central caregivers” (Quigley & Hall, 2016, p. 191). For some children, school provides the first opportunity they have to secure a relationship with an adult that is not a parent or family member; further, the relationships formed within the school setting have been found to be crucial to a child’s well-being, self-concept, confidence, and academic success (Bosworth, 1995; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McFarland, Murray et al., 2016; Noddings, 1984, 2005; Pianta et al., 1995; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Quigley & Hall, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011; Teven & McCrosky, 1997). Research by McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) reveals caring relationships with teachers benefit the most

vulnerable students, those who are at-risk, by providing safe relationships that act as a buffer from the negative associations they may experience in their lives outside of school.

It is imperative for educators to understand and recognize caring student-teacher relationships and appreciate the impact of caring student-teacher relationships on children to be able to forge better relationships with their students. Knowledge of caring student-teacher relationships should be used to refine professional development and pre-service teacher instruction. As Sabol and Pianta (2012) explain,

...there are few interventions that focus on modifying existing training to improve teachers' ability to form close relationships with children. Some preliminary evidence suggests that pre-service training may be a prime target for informing teachers on practices associated with high-quality relationships. (p. 224)

Therefore, through this research, I sought to enhance understanding of relationships formed among students and their teacher and determine how the relationships function from the student and teacher perspectives. This research also provides valuable insight into how the ethic of care plays out within the school environment and the impacts on students, teachers, and the educational environment.

### **Significance of the Study**

This present research contributes to deeper understandings of the teaching profession, specifically how relationships impact the educational process for both teachers and students. It also has the potential to inform teacher education programs, transform professional development for teachers and administrators, and change how teachers approach relationships with their students to foster successful outcomes. As discussed previously in this chapter, positive student-teacher relationships provide a



buffer for students who may experience turbulent relationships with other adults in their lives. This factor alone has profound impacts on students who may already be at-risk for academic or behavioral struggles (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Additionally, positive, caring relationships are essential for all students, as they contribute to a healthy classroom ecosystem and general well-being of students, which factor heavily into pedagogy and educational outcomes for students (Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011). At the time of this research and to the best of my knowledge, there are few studies, if any, which address both students and teachers to understand caring relationships within the classroom. This research addressed gaps in the existing literature about student-teacher relationships and shed light on the intricacies of caring relationships as they impact students and teachers.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

My research rests on the theoretical underpinnings of Noddings' Care Theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), The Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005), and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005), as critical to Care Theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), was used to provide a framework for interview questions and a theoretical lens to guide the data collection and analysis processes and procedures. Additionally, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) provided another theoretical lens, as the *relatedness* component of the theory rests heavily within teacher and student interactions. Each theoretical lens I employed offered a slightly different, but related, view of caring teacher/student relationships and informed my data collection and analysis processes.

### **Care Theory**

Care Theory is the notion of care and caring relationships with others are central to a moral being. Noddings (2005) discusses the ethics of care when she says, “A teacher exercises the virtue of caring by making students do what is thought to be good for them” (p. xiv). Noddings’ Care Theory is based on earlier work on the ethics of care by Carol Gilligan (1982). Gilligan attributed caring to the female gender and asserted males and females differed when it came to care for others. Noddings was inspired by Gilligan’s work and expanded on it to say caring is a reciprocal action which must be received by the cared-for and the carer to be construed as caring. While Noddings discusses caring as “maternal,” she also mentions any gender can be engaged in caring actions. Noddings’ work has focused on caring in the educational environment, as a continuation of maternal care children may or may not receive at home (1984, 2005).

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory, as coined by John Bowlby (1958, 1969, 2005), rests on the idea babies and children need to establish an attachment with their primary caregiver at an early age and failure to do so may result in emotional or behavioral problems later in life. Bowlby views mothers as the primary caregiver of an infant child. Once the child grows older, how they will bond with others is directly influenced by the bond in which they have established (or not established) with their primary caregiver (usually mother.) Insecure bonds will leave children lacking the skills to navigate the establishment of healthy, caring relationships throughout their lives. Insecure bonding with the primary caregiver directly impacts children in school, as the early childhood and elementary teacher often takes on the role of caregiver for their students. Connecting with students

who have insecure bonds with their primary caregiver may present a challenge to teachers trying to care for their students, as care is a reciprocal act in which the cared-for must receive the care for it to be effective, according to Noddings' Care Theory (1984, 2005).

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory, as coined by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) establishes *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness* each help to facilitate student self-regulation and motivation for learning. Teachers play a significant role in promoting a classroom environment conducive to fostering the psychological needs of students. The *relatedness* strand of the Self-Determination Theory implies how the teacher connects with students through caring actions. "Strategies for enhancing relatedness include conveying warmth, caring and respect to students" (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009, p. 141).

The use of Care Theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) provided rich context to my research. Attachment theory, being the most established of the three theories, laid the groundwork for care theory, as care theory is rooted in maternal attachment. Self-determination theory provides motivational constructs, with relatedness, the relationship, providing a central portion of motivational factors. Within the scope of this research, Attachment Theory, Care Theory and the Self-Determination Theory were used together to provide constructs on which to base interview questions, data collection and data analysis procedures. Utilizing the theoretical foundations of care, attachment, and self-determination allowed me to uncover the complex construct of caring relationships within the classroom.

## Methodology

**Philosophical underpinnings.** Epistemology is defined by Egbert and Sanden (2014) as, “the individual lens, created through our worldview, that we use to understand knowledge in the world” (p. 17). Employing a constructivist epistemology with an interpretivist paradigm (Egbert & Sanden, 2014) guided the research and supported the chosen methodology of portrayed case study. A constructivist epistemology rejects objective Truth with a capital T and, instead, is based upon the idea that knowledge is constructed by individual experiences of individuals (Egbert & Sanden, 2014). A paradigm, according to Egbert and Sanden (2014) is, “...a researcher’s specific stance on how knowledge...can be revealed” (p. 32). The interpretivist paradigm, specifically, recognizes interpretations are essential to human interactions and knowledge.

**Portrayed case study.** Qualitative case study along with portraiture methodologies were used for a *portrayed case study* approach. Case study research, according to Creswell (2013) “involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Resting on the work of Lightfoot, 1985; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; and Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, portraiture lends a humanistic approach to my research, drawing on the raw student and teacher relationships and their impact within the classroom on student motivation and classroom culture. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016), portraiture is a phenomenological methodology which may be used by case study researchers to paint a portrait of the participants, merging art and science into research. I find the role of the portraitist intriguing, as the portraitist interacts holistically with participants. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain, “The portraitist stance is one of

acceptance and discernment, generosity and challenge, encouraging the actors in the expression of their strengths, competencies, and insights” (p. 141).

Portraiture, as discussed by Chapman (2007), “...captures the voices, relationships, and meaning-making of participants...in one fluid vision that is constructed by researchers and participants” (p. 157). Further, Giraldo and Colyar (2012) describe the union of case study and portraiture beautifully as, “Portraiture methods enhance the traditional case study process, authorizing a more considered presentation of participants and context” (p. 25). Employing a portrayed case study research design permitted me to capture the raw, humanistic interactions which occur naturally within the classroom, holistically addressing my research questions.

A portrayed case study grounded in constructivist and interpretivist ideals allowed me to become an observer and participant, engaged in the everyday classroom life of my participants to gain a better understanding of how caring teacher-student relationships impact the teacher, students, and the classroom culture. Altogether, this methodology was appropriate for answering the research questions outlined earlier because it allowed for the raw interactions of the individuals to unfold naturally, while respecting their lived-experiences and emotions.

### **Researcher Role**

As consistent with portraiture methodology, I immersed myself within the field as an *observer as participant*. Glesne (2016) says of the role, “the researcher remains primarily an observer but has some interaction with study participants” (p. 65). As an outsider to the research site, I visited the participant teacher’s classroom at least once per week during the five month data collection window and became part of the classroom;

mindful not to disturb the flow of the school day, but remain familiar enough that the students and teacher involved in the study felt comfortable enough to talk to me and share their experiences and thoughts throughout the process. “Portraitists need to prepare for site visits thoroughly, interact with the actors on the scene with *dignity and care*, and guard the relationships that are established through the writing of the final portraits” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 173).

### **Definition of Terms**

Common terms referenced throughout this research include *caring*, *child*, *ethic of care*, *motivation*, and *student-teacher relationship (STR)*. These terms are defined below:

*Caring* is, “...in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings- a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In order for the relation to be properly called caring, both parties must contribute...” (Noddings, 2005, p. 15).

*Child* is occasionally used interchangeably with the term *student* within the context of this research.

*Ethic of care*, as defined by Gilligan (1982), encourages people to become caring individuals through the development and practice of caring behaviors toward others. The ethic of care stresses the relational aspect of caring and recognizes the complementary roles of the carer and the cared-for within the process (Noddings, 2005). Within an educational context, “...an ethic of caring as four major components: *modeling*, *dialogue*, *practice*, and *confirmation*” (Noddings, 2005, p. 23).

*Motivation* involves the internal and external influences that determine the reason(s) a person aims to achieve or elects not to attempt a task.

*Student-Teacher Relationship (STR)*, within the context of this research, student-teacher relationship (STR) refer to the intricate interactions between a student and a teacher, which have some degree of mutuality.

### Summary

“...a teacher exercises the virtue of caring by making students do what is thought to be good for them” (Noddings, 2005, p. xiv). It is essential for educators to become aware of the relational aspect of education and the potential impacts on students and teachers. Throughout this research, I examined the relationships that form within the classroom setting and gained understanding of how they develop, are maintained, and, most importantly, how they impacted the educational experience and the individuals navigating the relationships.

As *Chapter One: Introduction* encompassed the basic components of the research including statement of problem, purpose of the study, research questions, rationale of the study, significance of the study, theoretical foundation, and definition of terms, chapter two focuses on pertinent literature related to the field of study. *Chapter Two: Literature Review* provides an in-depth review of past and current research pertaining to care theory and student-teacher relationships. Additionally, a succinct overview of the conceptual framework guiding this study is detailed in chapter two to highlight the theoretical and structural components which guide the research. *Chapter Three: Methodology* delivers the methodological framework including rationale, research setting, data sources, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and limitations of the research. *Chapter Four: Findings* details a culmination of the findings from this research including a comprehensive account of the data through portraits of each participant. Photographs

and highlights from in-the-field conversations are also included. *Chapter Five: Discussion* offers a discussion of the findings in light of past research, implications for stakeholders, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Educators are tasked with facilitating a safe learning environment for their students, but often the caring component of education is overlooked in favor of rigorous standards and assessments, leaving little attention on what could be one of the most crucial elements for student success: to feel accepted and cared-for by their teachers. Teachers, according to Noddings (1984, 2005), have the responsibility to help students develop their capacity to care through moral education and the best way to model is through the continuous, caring relationships between students and their teachers. As defined in the previous chapter, the *ethic of care*, as defined by Gilligan (1982), encourages people to become caring individuals through the development and practice of caring behaviors toward others. The ethic of care stresses the relational aspect of caring and recognizes the complementary roles of the carer and the cared-for within the process (Noddings, 2005). Within an educational context, "...an ethic of caring as four major components: *modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation*" (Noddings, 2005, p. 23). Noddings (2005) expands on this explanation as she says, "...a teacher exercises the virtue of caring by making students do what is thought to be good for them" (p. xiv). Throughout this research, I connect with Noddings' (2005) notions of caring. Noddings (2005) speaks of caring when she says, "...in its most basic form, [caring is] a connection or encounter between two human beings- a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In

order for the relation to be properly called caring, both parties must contribute...” (p. 15). The way one cares for someone may be different than others, and the definition of caring is a personal one, as it often evokes an emotional response. The way a mother cares for an infant may be different than how a teacher cares for their students, but the basic premise of caring rests on the idea of doing what is thought to be best for the cared-for (Noddings, 1984, 2005).

Unfortunately, there is a gap in the research related to how those caring relationships are formed, how they function, and most importantly, how those caring relationships genuinely impact teachers and students to foster motivation and success. A solid understanding of how caring relationships between students and teachers influence the individuals and the overall classroom culture is critical for furthering teacher education and professional development programs for teachers. I analyzed previous research focused on student-teacher relationships using the following search terms: *Care theory, caring, caring student-teacher relationships, caring relationships, student-teacher relationships and student motivation, student-teacher relationships, student-teacher relationships and teacher well-being*. From my search, literature was analyzed and grouped based upon the focus of the research. Overarching themes of caring and relational factors were prevalent in almost all of the previous research, and most studies tended to focus on either the teacher *or* the student perception and experience of caring. Very few studies garnered within my search examined both the student and teacher experiences as a collective whole. This review of literature is composed of four sections: Constructs of caring and relational factors in education, student perspectives of care and relationships, teacher perspectives of care and relationships, and conceptual framework.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Constructs of Caring and Relational Factors in Education**

Referencing caring within the context of life, Gilligan (1982) referred to an ethic of caring described as a way of life or a moral component to living. The ethic of care, as defined by Gilligan, involves acting responsively toward self and others, while establishing and maintaining a connection. While Gilligan attributed the ethic of caring as a traditionally female role, Noddings (1984; 2005) expanded on Gilligan's ideas to say that any gender can engage as a caregiver. Noddings mentions care is a reciprocal action which must be received and acknowledged by the cared-for to complete the cycle of care (1984, 2005). The Care Theory was born out of Noddings' work, which focuses on caring in the educational environment, as a continuation of maternal care children may or may not receive at home (1984, 2005). Further, Noddings has repeatedly emphasized the crucial role of caring in the classroom and believes teachers should base their decisions around an ethic of caring to improve student outcomes (Noddings, 1984, 2005). The model of caring, coined by Noddings (1984), involves modeling, dialogue, and confirmation. Modeling of caring behaviors comes from the teacher, dialogue between the teacher and the student is the reciprocal act, and finally, the student confirms the caring by giving the teacher feedback. This feedback could be in the form of care espoused to the teacher or a simple acknowledgment of the reception of care from the teacher with a smile or a nod from the student.

Other research in the field points to the need for children to understand their teachers are reliable and available to them (Noddings, 1984, 2005; Rogers & Webb, 1991). "The ethic of caring involves a fidelity to relation that is based on more than

personal liking or regard. It must become an integral part of the professional standards that under grid the thousands of decisions made daily by teachers” (Rogers & Webb, 1991, p. 175). Noddings equates the teaching profession to that of a continuation of motherhood; Nurturing students and being available to the students emotionally to create and maintain those crucial bonds (Noddings, 1984, 2005). Noddings’ work, according to Quigley and Hall (2016), is “situated within relational pedagogy, which supports the connection of relationships and theory as the foundation for good teaching practices” (p. 183).

Pianta et al. (1995) define crucial factors of student-teacher relationships through the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale as *closeness*, *conflict*, and *dependency*.

*Closeness* defines the warm interpersonal interactions and communication. *Conflict* describes the negativity and strife in the relationship. *Dependency* involves how the student comes to depend on the teacher. “...existing evidence suggests that for teachers as for many members of other ‘caring professions,’ care appears to be interpreted as the interpersonal experience of human nurturance, connectedness, warmth, and love”

(Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991, p. 497.) Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) espouse,

When the purposes of care are balanced with those of group management and instructional effectiveness, and when care is construed in social and moral terms as well as interpersonal ones, its contribution to quality in education can be exceptionally valuable. (p. 497)

## Student Perspectives of Care and Relationships

Discussing care and relationships, Noddings (2005) says,

The desire to be cared for is almost certainly a universal human characteristic.

Not everyone wants to be cuddled or fussed over. But everyone wants to be received, to elicit a response that is congruent with an underlying need or desire.

(p. 17)

To better understand the impact of student-teacher relationships, Bosworth (1995) explored student perspectives of caring relationships. Bosworth interviewed one hundred middle school students to find out how they defined caring from their teachers. The students involved in this study revealed common themes within their definitions of caring: *helping (with schoolwork or helping a friend in need), feelings (empathy), relationships (respecting others), values (being kind to others), activities (spending time with someone, listening to someone)* (p. 690-692). When asked about what makes a teacher “caring,” themes that emerged were: *helping with schoolwork, valuing individuality, showing respect, being tolerant, explaining work, checking for understanding, encouraging, and planning for fun activities* (p. 690-292). Non-school activities students identified as caring were: *helping with personal problems, providing guidance, and going the extra mile to help a student*. The students also identified personal attributes they associated with caring teachers: *being friendly/polite, liking to help students, being success-oriented, and being involved* (p. 690-692).

Hughes (2011) discovered student gains through a longitudinal study of student-teacher relationships. “When children perceive social support in the forms of affection, admiration, satisfaction, and strength of alliance, they develop academically relevant self-

views that promote motivation engagement in learning” (Hughes, 2011, p. 55).

Similarly, research suggests caring relationships between students and teachers are good predictors of long-term student success which enhance social functioning, help to alleviate behavior problems, and may increase learning engagement and motivation in the classroom (Davis, 2003, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, 2011; Roorda, Koomen, et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011; Teven & McCrosky, 1997; Teven, 2001).

However, negative student-teacher relationships marred by conflict have proven to be detrimental to student self-esteem and academic achievement. The negative relationship impacts crucial socioemotional skills to form stable relationships with peers and others and increases the risk of academic retention (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Pianta et al. 1995). However, Davis (2006) and Willis and Brophy (1974) found teachers typically formed positive relationships with students who performed at a higher level and were successful and successful students reported more positive relations with their teachers.

Furthermore, students who are at-risk due to a variety of factors or have a history of abuse have the most at stake regarding the relationship they may or may not form with their teacher (Armstrong, Haskett, & Hawkins, 2017; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) explored teacher-student relationships and the impact on students who were identified as at-risk due to the variety of factors. Findings suggest at-risk students can greatly benefit from positive relationships with teachers, as positive student-teacher relationships may counteract negativity in the child’s life including adverse life events and poor parent-child relationships. “Having a positive relationship with a teacher is a powerful buffer...” (p. 14). Further, Hamre and Pianta (2005) found kindergarten students who exhibited high-

risk factors were at higher risk of forming poor relationships with their teachers in subsequent years unless placed with teachers who offered positive emotional support. When correctly matched with teachers who could best meet their emotional needs through relationships, the high-risk students fared equal to their non-high-risk peers (p. 962). Armstrong, Haskett, et al. (2017) suggest children with a history of abuse may benefit from improved relationships with teachers and other caregivers to negate the negative schemas developed due to the previous abuse. The findings point to the idea schools should play a role in facilitating better relational skills among at-risk students to help them form healthy bonds with teachers and their peers.

### **Teacher Perspectives of Care and Relationships**

Koca (2016) found, "...a teacher's sense of well-being and success within the classroom climate influences the quality of the teacher-student relationship" (p. 9). Moreover, Quigley and Hall (2016) discuss the role of the teacher as a caregiver and how they must receive caring from their students to become stronger teachers, as the relationship with students is viewed as a 'reward' for teaching. Other studies take this idea further and suggest teacher-student relationships influence teacher job-satisfaction and may provide clues to keep veteran teachers in the field longer (Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011; Veldman, Tartwijk, Brekelmans & Wubbels, 2013). "The more important care is to a teacher, the more emotionally devastating is the experience of failing to provide it (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991). Teachers, according to Rogers & Webb (1991) "can help fulfill a child's basic need for security and attachment [like a parent] by considering what is best for the child" (p. 176).

Claessens, Tartwijk, Pennings, et al. (2016) found differences between beginner and more experienced teachers in the ways they perceived and established relationships with their students. Novice teachers tend to forge relationships with students who made them feel positive about their teaching; those who succeeded at school and gave the teacher positive feedback on their teaching (Claessens, Tartwijk, et al., 2016). Experienced teachers in the study placed the student first and described the relationship from the students' viewpoint and how the student benefitted from the relationship with the teacher. Further, Claessens, Tartwijk, et al. (2016) point to a dire necessity for increased instruction for teachers in the areas of care and relationships. They say, "Although studies show that teachers are aware of their role as socializers, not all teachers possess the knowledge and competencies necessary for establishing these caring relationships with students..." (p. 97).

Noddings (1984, 2005) has consistently called for teachers to become caregivers through professional training opportunities. Expanding on Noddings' ideas, Sabol and Pianta (2012) and Quigley and Hall (2016) each express concern regarding the lack of pre-service training to improve teacher awareness and ability to form solid relationships with students. Quigley and Hall (2016) comment,

despite concerns of the importance of teachers learning to 'care' for their students, most teacher education programs do not utilize relational pedagogy and place little emphasis on caring...scholars must concentrate on the one caring versus the one cared for to extrapolate how caring leads to good pedagogy. (p. 181-182)

Weinstein (1998) studied pre-service teachers through their student teaching experiences to understand how they perceived and practiced caring with their students. Results



*showed demonstrating respect, showing interest in students' interests, treating students as individuals, telling students they cared about them, showing empathy, engaging in personal conversations, listening, giving students a voice during lessons and allowing student-feedback* were all ways in which the pre-service teachers perceived caring in their classrooms (p. 160). Additional thoughts from pre-service teachers included, *the teacher being willing to slow the lesson down if it is difficult for students, offer help to students outside of school, give students a voice and include them in lesson planning aligned with what they would like to learn, explain why when a student is disciplined, not criticize students, and above all else, show respect to students* (Weinstein, 1998, p. 161).

Constructs of caring have been analyzed through life and educational contexts within the literature through accounts from pre-service teachers, practicing teachers, and students. Previous research points to the fact that caring relationships between students and teachers have the potential to provide benefits for all stakeholders, however, the extent to which the caring relationships impact teachers and students has yet to be fully determined. Additionally, studies have shown differences in the ways students and teachers perceive caring, indicating a mismatch of expectations that begs to be uncovered. There also exists a gap in the literature which focuses on the complete cycle of caring from the collective viewpoints of teachers and the students they interact with on a daily basis.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework, according to Egbert and Sanden (2014), is described as the way in which a person views the world. An individual's conceptual framework consists of "...the sum of one's experiences, beliefs, and knowledge from every facet of

life...” (p. 5). It is described by Egbert and Sanden (2014) as a canvas on which a painting rests. The canvas provides a base for the painting, just as a conceptual framework provides a foundation on which to ground research. The conceptual framework acts as a base on which to grow the researcher’s epistemological the ontological stance to guide the research. As defined by Egbert and Sanden (2014) epistemology is, “the individual lens, created through our worldview, that we use to understand knowledge in the world” (p. 17). It guides how the research is viewed and conducted and provides a mean for individual understanding. Egbert and Sanden (2014) provide a tree as a diagram, as depicted in *figure 1*. The diagram shows how the pieces of a conceptual framework fit together to support the research. Research is grounded in the conceptual framework, and the researcher’s epistemological stance supports and provides nourishment to the research through the roots of the tree. The paradigm acts as the tree trunk, which gives way to theory, as it is generated through the researcher’s epistemological stance and paradigm. The methods, as they are depicted as leaves on the diagram, provide a guide for how the study is conducted. Each of the components, as described, play a vital role in the research process.

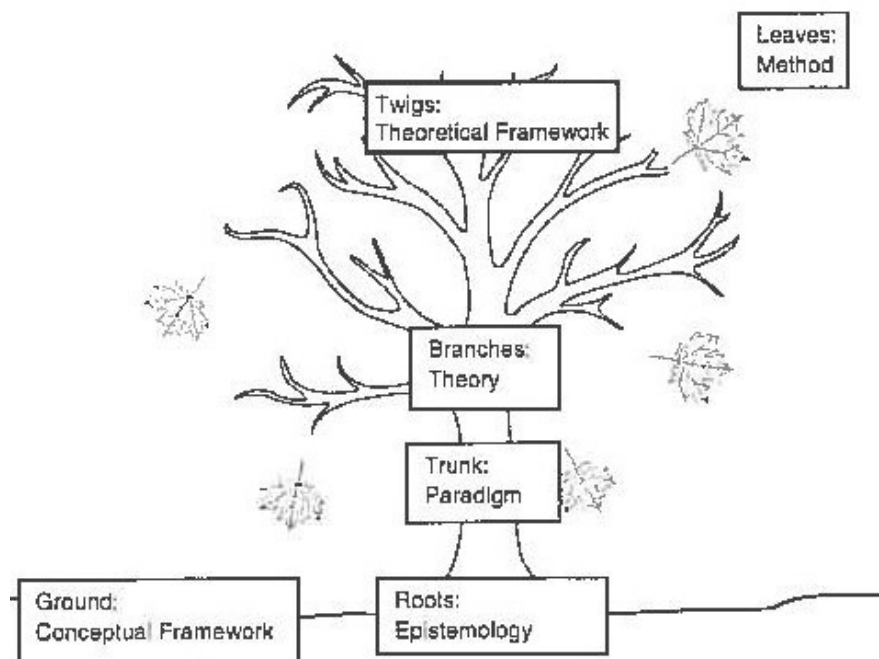


Figure 1. Methods Tree (Egbert & Sanden, 2014, p. 86).

### Constructionism and Interpretivism

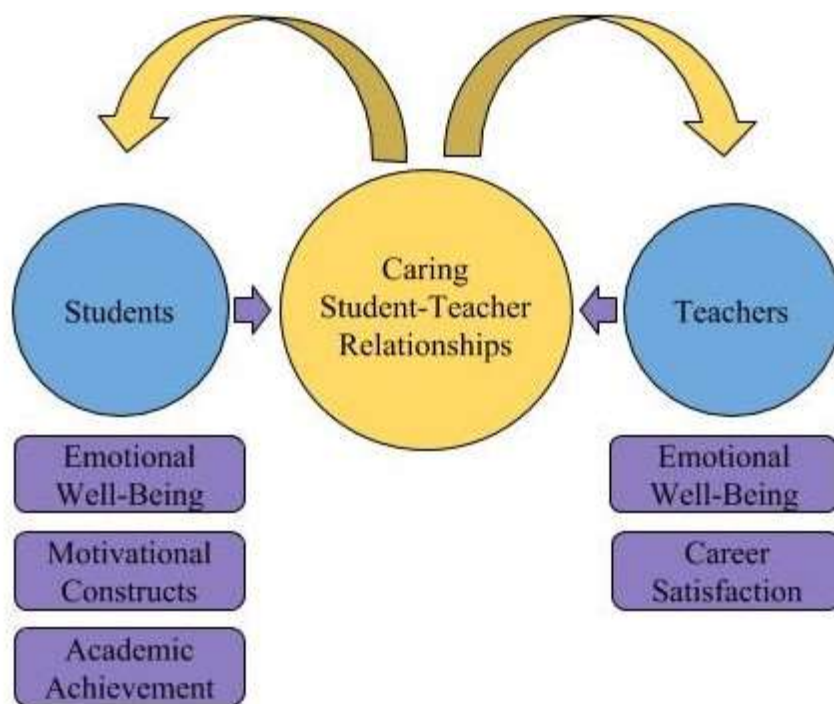
**Constructionism.** Constructionism provides the base on which my research was formed and how it was conducted to answer the research questions. Crotty (1998) points out through literature, the terms *constructivism* and *constructionism* are often used interchangeably. He contends, "...to reserve the term *constructivism* for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on 'the meaning-making activity of the individual mind' and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes 'the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning'" (p. 58). Through this research, I used both definitions to define my work. According to Crotty (1998), "In the constructionist view...meaning is not discovered but constructed" (p. 42). A primary tenant of constructionism is meaning does not exist until one attributes it through individual experience (Crotty, 1998; Egbert & Sanden, 2014).

The underlying ontological belief is that there is no truth with a capital *T*, there is only truth with a lowercase *t*. Truth, then, is simply what each person constructs through personal experiences and the meaning they attribute to those experiences. “When constructionism claims is that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Before there were consciousness on earth capable of interpreting the world, the world held no meaning at all” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Meaning making is an on-going process, which determines how one views events, objects, in relation to others. Crotty (1998) explains the process of meaning-making when he says, “...there is no true or valid interpretation. There are useful interpretations, to be sure, and these stand over against interpretations that appear to serve no useful purpose” (p. 47). Employing a constructionism foundation as my conceptual framework encouraged my research to embrace a constructivist epistemological stance with a guiding interpretivist paradigm. The constructivist epistemology and interpretivist paradigm supported the theoretical framework and case study and portraiture methodologies worked together to form this portrayed case study.

**Interpretivist paradigm.** The interpretivist paradigm recognizes explicitly that interpretations are essential to human interactions and knowledge. A paradigm, according to Egbert and Sanden (2014) is, “...a researcher’s specific stance on how knowledge...can be revealed” (p. 32). Interpretivism, as explained by Crotty (1998), stems from positivism and contradistinction as a means to interpret reality through social, humanistic means. “The interpretivist approach...looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social-life world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). In the case of this research, the interpretivist paradigm informs the ways in which I viewed the problem,

guided the data collection process, informed the interpretation of data, while providing a base on which to grow my research, as depicted as the tree trunk in Egbert and Sanden's (2014) tree diagram displayed in *figure 1*.

This research rested upon the conceptual framework outlined in *Figure 2*. The figure depicts how the concepts of caring student-teacher relationships impact stakeholders through emotional well-being, motivational constructs, academic achievement, and career satisfaction. Along with the conceptual framework shown in *figure 2*, a constructivist epistemological stance with an interpretivist paradigm guided my research and provided a foundation on which theory was developed and the chosen methodology of portrayed case study was supported.



*Figure 2.* Conceptual Framework

### Summary

Previous research has shown care and relationships within the classroom are vital for student success, and those caring relationships may provide even more significant

benefits for students who are already at-risk. Further, the ethic of caring is central to the academic and emotional development of students and provides benefits for the teacher, regarding job satisfaction and emotional well-being. Moreover, caring student-teacher relationships, according to previous research, impact students in school and within their personal lives and show impacts on student behavior, academic success, and social functioning (Davis, 2003, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, 2011; Roorda, Koomen, et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011; Teven & McCrosky, 1997; Teven, 2001).

While there is a base of previous research focusing on student-teacher relationships, many studies do not focus on care within the relational construct and very few include students and teachers within their research, opting only to include one or the other. McHugh, Horner, Colditz, and Wallace (2013) mention the lack of research involving both students and teachers. Previous research tends to focus on the teachers and according to McHugh, Horner, et al. (2013), may lack context and overlook the individual experiences of the children, which provide a vital source of information on how the relationships function. Without an accurate understanding of how the caring relationships operate as a whole, with teachers and students together as they interact within the classroom, there will continue to be a void within the research relating to caring student-teacher relationships.

Through this research, I uncovered and explored the functions and impacts of caring relationships on one teacher and her students through a holistic lens, shedding light on a highly important yet often-overlooked facet of education. Quigley and Hall (2016) state, "...if caring is added to the robust literature on teacher education and as teacher educators we teach ways to care, teachers will have specific pedagogical strategies to

create an environment that is supportive of an ethic of care which is foundational to learning” (p. 193). More understanding of how caring student-teacher relationships form, function, and how they impact the stakeholders is essential to advancing teacher education programs, professional development offerings for educators, and pedagogical approaches within classrooms. This present research helped to bridge the gap in the literature by enhancing the understanding of how care influences the classroom environment and personally impacts teachers and students. *Chapter 3* covers the methodology of the research, illuminating the philosophical foundations and the rationale for the chosen methodology of qualitative portrayed case study. In addition, discussions of the research setting, participants, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and limitations and delimitations are included.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Focusing on the lived experiences of one teacher, Ann Black, and seven (7) of her students as they interacted, I explored the ways in which students and teachers conceptualize and experience caring relationships within the classroom and uncovered the impacts through a portrayed case study approach. This chapter explains the rationale behind the chosen methodology of portrayed case study and connection to the research questions including a discussion of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the research. Research setting, participants, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis methods, and trustworthiness are each addressed within this chapter. Finally, I provide a discussion of limitations and delimitations of the research and a summary of the chapter.

#### **Rationale**

#### **Research Questions**

As previously discussed in chapter one, this research employed case study and portraiture methodologies together, also referred to as *portrayed case study* methodology (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012) to answer the following research questions:

- Q1     What is the nature of caring student-teacher relationships?
- Q2     How do teachers perceive caring student-teacher relationships to impact themselves and their students?
- Q3     How do students perceive caring from their teachers?



### **Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings**

This research rested on a constructivist epistemology with an interpretivist paradigm, which guided the research and supported the methodology of portrayed case study. Epistemology is defined by Egbert and Sanden (2014) as, “the individual lens, created through our worldview, that we use to understand knowledge in the world” (p. 17). A constructivist epistemology rejects objective Truth with a capital T and, instead, is based upon the idea that knowledge is constructed by individual experiences of individuals (Egbert & Sanden, 2014). Additionally, an interpretivist paradigm guided how I approached and viewed data collection and analysis throughout this research. The interpretivist paradigm, specifically, recognized that interpretations are essential to human interactions and knowledge. A paradigm, according to Egbert and Sanden (2014) is, “...a researcher’s specific stance on how knowledge...can be revealed” (p. 32).

As detailed in chapter one, the theoretical underpinnings of Noddings’ Care Theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), the Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005), and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) together provide a solid foundation on which my research is based. Each theory brings a slightly different angle on which to base my research questions, data collection materials, data analysis techniques, and the research overall. Altogether, these theories worked hand-in-hand to provide a cohesive theoretical base on which I explored the complexity of relational matters between one teacher and seven of her students within a classroom setting.

### **Portrayed Case Study**

Qualitative case study along with portraiture methodologies were used for a *portrayed case study* approach. Case study research, according to Creswell (2013) “involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Portraiture, resting on the work of Lawrence-Lightfoot (1985; 1997; 2016), provided a humanistic approach to my research, drawing on the raw student and teacher relationships and the impact of those relationships within the classroom. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016), portraiture is a phenomenological methodology that may be used by case study researchers to paint a portrait of the participants, merging art and science into research. Portraiture “...captures the voices, relationships, and meaning-making of participants...in one fluid vision that is constructed by researchers and participants” (Chapman, 2007, p. 157). As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain, “The portraitist stance is one of acceptance and discernment, generosity and challenge, encouraging the actors in the expression of their strengths, competencies, and insights” (p. 141). Employing case study and portraiture methodologies together, such as in this research, comes naturally to both methodologies, as they worked as complementary pieces, each enhancing the research. Giraldo and Colyar (2012) describe the union of case study and portraiture beautifully as, “portraiture methods enhance the traditional case study process, authorizing a more considered presentation of participants and context” (p. 25).

I found the role of the portraitist intriguing, as the portraitist interacts holistically with participants to discern meaning from the observed and perceived interactions. A portrayed case study grounded in constructivist and interpretivist ideals allowed me to become an observer as participant, engaged in the everyday classroom life of my participants to gain a better understanding of how caring teacher-student relationships impact the teacher, students, and the classroom culture itself while capturing the raw, humanistic interactions, which occur naturally within the classroom. Altogether, this methodology was appropriate for answering the research questions outlined in this study because it allowed for the raw interactions of the individuals to unfold naturally, while respecting their lived-experiences and emotions.

### **Research Setting**

The research took place in an alternative placement public charter school located in a coastal region of Florida. Since this is a charter school and not a zoned neighborhood school, any students who reside within the school district are eligible to attend. Students who attend this alternative placement charter school can choose to enroll by choice, be referred by the school district due to behavioral and/or academic concerns, or attend to achieve credit recovery for middle and high school courses. Additionally, students attend the charter school when exiting the Department of Juvenile Justice system before they are allowed back into their zoned public school within the school district. The student population is diverse. The charter school served 197 students in grades 4-12 for the 2019-2020 school year. Out of the 197 students enrolled, 112 are white, 75 are black, 8 are Hispanic or Latino, and 2 are Asian. During the 2019-2020 school year, 82%

of enrolled students qualified for free or reduced lunches. Of those students, 156 qualified for free lunches and 5 students qualified for reduced-price lunches.

### **Researcher's Stance**

I chose the research location due to familiarity and location. The private company I am employed by holds contracts for management services with this school site and several others within the state. This particular school site was the closest in proximity to my home. While the company I work for provides human resources, curricular and financial support to the school site via contract services, I do not personally oversee the school administration or staff, nor do they view me as a supervisor.

The design of this research came from my own experiences as a student in public school and then my experiences as a teacher. As the parent of elementary and middle school-aged children, I also bring experiences of caring student-teacher relationships from the parent viewpoint. My personal cultural experiences and professional background also influence how I view the research. Additionally, my experiences as a student, teacher, and parent have each impacted the design of this research and I am aware of the necessity to remove my personal feelings and experiences from my observations and findings during the course of this research.

### **Research Participants**

Throughout this research, I focused on one classroom teacher currently teaching middle and high school reading remediation at the previously mentioned school site, a public charter school located within the state of Florida. Within the teacher participant's classroom, through convenience selection methods, seven (7) student participants

consented to participate in my research. Including the teacher and a sampling of students in this study provided a multi-dimensional vantage point to best view the relationships from both teacher and student perspectives. This research benefitted from a small number of participants, as I was able to spend more time with each participant, capturing the intricate relationships, while respecting the portraitist stance. As consistent with portraiture methodology, the I worked together with the participants to co-construct the portraits, or stories of their lived-experiences, and encouraged the participants to reveal the true beauty that lies within their experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1985; 1997; 2016).

### **Teachers**

One (1) teacher participant was selected through purposive sampling methods. Purposive sampling “consists of persons who have unique backgrounds or characteristics that make them the target of closer individual study” (Shank, Brown, & Pringle, 2014, p. 65). I used purposive sampling of teachers in hopes of tapping into the experiences of teachers who have established strong classroom cultures and have beneficial relationships with their students. A call for participants was announced to all teachers currently teaching at the research site. Once a teacher expressed interest in the study, a modified version of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001), assessing teacher well-being and relationships (Pianta, 2001; Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley, & Gooze, 2015) was administered. The modified Student-Teacher Relationship Scale, assessing teacher well-being, was used to select participant teachers by determining closeness and conflict factors with their students, as a class. After being used as a participant selection tool, the scale was later analyzed as data. See Appendix A for the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001) and Modified Teacher Well-Being Scale (Pianta, 2001; Whitaker,

Dearth-Wesley, et al, 2015). Originally, I would have enjoyed having more than one teacher participant in this study but having only one consent to participate made the research richer, as I was able to spend more time with the teacher.

### **Students**

Within the participant teacher's classroom, seven (7) students were selected as participants through convenience sampling methods. A letter was sent home with each student enrolled in the participant teacher's class seeking parent and student permission per IRB protocol. Seven (7) students brought their forms back to participate in the research and out of the seven students who consented, three (3) were already legal adults so they did not require parent permission to participate.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To protect the identity and interests of the participants, each participant was given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to use throughout the research. Some participants chose to allow the use of their real names, while a select few chose to use pseudonyms. A spreadsheet with each participant, their real name, and chosen pseudonym is stored in a password-protected online cloud storage system. Additionally, the name of the school, district, and any other identifying information is kept in a confidential spreadsheet within a password protected, encrypted online cloud storage program. Since the group of participants is relatively small and from one school site, only the participants, parents of participants and the school staff would have any way of deducing the identities of the participants. Ethical considerations according to Internal Review Board (IRB) protocol were followed to ensure participants fully understood potential risks and their role in the

research including understanding they could elect to stop participating at any time. IRB approval is located in Appendix I.

The ethical practice of research dictates, “we are morally bound to conduct research in a manner that minimizes potential harm to those involved in the study. We should be as concerned with producing an ethical research design as we are an intellectually coherent and compelling one” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 161). To ensure ethical practices throughout the research process, participants were fully briefed on the research itself and their role before consenting with the understanding they could choose to opt out of the study at any time. Additionally, the parents of the most vulnerable participants (the students), as well as the students themselves, consented to participation after fully understanding the risks, benefits, and time-commitment of the research. All participants were presented with the opportunity to select a pseudonym to be used throughout the research process, and the school and district name was not used to protect participants and the school. Appendix B contains the initial contact letter for teacher participants, Appendix C includes the initial contact letter for student participants, Appendix D consists of the consent form for teacher participants, Appendix E contains the consent form for parents, and Appendix F contains the assent form for minor student participants.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data was collected over a period of five months during the fall 2019 semester through artifacts, interviews and extensive classroom observations. The first layer of data collection involved teacher-reported relationships with their students through a modified version of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001) and the Teacher Well-

Being Scale (Pianta, 2001; Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley, et al., 2015.) This brief Likert survey asked the teacher to report their overall well-being as related to the relationship they perceived with their class, as a whole, not considering the individual relationships they may have with particular students. The participant teacher was also asked to evaluate their perceived relationships with each student participant using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001). This Likert scale, located in Appendix A, provides information regarding individual relationships within the classroom, regarding closeness and conflict which the teacher perceives with each student. The results from the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001) was used to provide a standard on which to base the student participants' perceptions and to see if there were misconceptions on either side of the relationship.

### **Artifacts**

Artifact collection was a central component of this research and helped me to understand the relational aspects of the instructional component of school through lesson plans (the intentions) and student work samples (the products). Artifacts included feedback to students on assignments (verbal or written), "gifts" from students to the teacher (artwork, notes, trinkets, flowers, etc.), student work samples, artwork, lesson plans, and photographs. While this research would have benefitted from the use of video, I found it to be distracting to the students, so I switched to using only photographs to capture the classroom and participants. The completed Student-Teacher Relationship Scales (Pianta, 2001) and modified Teacher-Relationship Scales, measuring teacher well-being (Pianta, 2001; Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley, et al., 2015) were also analyzed as data.

### **Interviews**



**Teacher interview.** The teacher participant, Ann, participated in an individual, semi-structured interview in October, towards the middle of the data collection window. Follow-up questioning occurred organically and as a conversation as I was in the field observing, as consistent with portraiture methodology. The semi-structured interview took place off campus at a local coffee shop. Being off campus helped Ann to relax and we were able to have time together without distraction. The teacher interview was recorded using encrypted transcription software. See interview protocol in Appendix G.

**Student interviews.** Student participants participated in semi-structured interviews individually on campus two weeks after the teacher interview session. Morrison (2013) indicates that children may perceive being interviewed by an adult as a threatening situation and may also provide answers the child believes the interviewer wants to hear, which may not be truthful. To reduce the anxiety of working with an unfamiliar adult, I conducted the student interviews in a small teacher workroom off to the side of their classroom while the teacher and their classmates were nearby, but not close enough that they could hear our conversation. Further, the teacher and classmates could not see us during the interview session, but it was recorded on the schools' video monitoring system without sound to ensure the students' safety and comfort of knowing staff members could see them. Correlating with the Student-Teacher Relationship Scales (Pianta, 2001) which Ann used to document her perceptions of relationships with her students as individuals, the students participated in semi-structured interviews to uncover their side of the relationship. Follow-up questioning was completed in a casual manner within the classroom as new situations arose. Interview sessions were recorded using encrypted transcription software. Interview protocol is located in Appendix G.

## Observations

Classroom observations took place regularly throughout the research data collection window from August 2019 through December 2019. I visited the teacher participants' classroom *at least* one day per week, more often as time allowed, for the five-month data collection window and remained for the entire school day. During observations, I documented the interactions between Ann and her students through photographs and typed extensive field notes. As mentioned earlier, the use of video was not feasible, as it proved to be distracting to the students with attempts early in the research process. As centered on care theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), I observed to see how Ann cared for her students through “making students do what is thought to be good for them” (Noddings, 2005, p. xiv) and how Ann and her students contributed to the caring relations observed within the classroom. As Noddings (1984, 2005) asserts, caring cannot be complete without the carer and cared-for both participating and contributing to the relation through “...reception, recognition, and response” (Noddings, 2005, p. 16), therefore, I searched for ways in which Ann engaged the students and how the students did or did not receive and respond to the actions of Ann.

The *relatedness* strand of the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) is an essential factor for student motivation, which implies how the teacher connects with students through caring actions. “Strategies for enhancing relatedness include conveying warmth, caring and respect to students” (Niemi & Ryan, 2009, p. 141). Resting on the Self-Determination theory, I observed how Ann conveyed caring to her students through warmth and respect. When coupled with *autonomy*,

*competence*, the *relatedness* strand of the Self-Determination Theory helps to facilitate student self-regulation and motivation for learning.

My observations were focused on understanding caring relationships through the intricate, often personal, interactions between a teacher and their students. I observed Ann's classroom environment including wall hangings, décor, student and teacher work areas, and displayed student work as well as the interactions between Ann and individual students and the class. I also focused on the class as whole; how Ann spoke to the students, how the students spoke to Ann, and how daily instruction took place within the classroom were also part of the classroom observations. After each day of classroom observation, I took some time to sort through the information and note thoughts related to the observation block through analytic memos. *Table 1* contains my data collection timeline.

Table 1

*Data Collection Timeline*

<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Observations	August 2019-December 2019	Researcher, Participant Teacher, Participant Students, Classroom
Interviews	<i>Teacher Interview:</i> October 2019 <i>Student Interviews:</i> November 1-15, 2019	Researcher, Participant Teacher, Participant Students
Artifacts	August 2019-December 2019	Researcher, Participant Teacher, Participant Students

## **Data Analysis Methods**

### **Analytic Memos**

Consistent with constructivist ideals, I constructed patterns of understanding from the collected data to inform meaning. Analytic memos were used to document thoughts throughout the research process to aid in the analysis of data. Saldaña, 2016 says, “Analytic memos are somewhat comparable to researcher journal entries or blogs- a place to ‘dump your brain’ about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation...coding and analytic memo writing are concurrent qualitative data analytic activities” (p. 44). As aligned with the purpose of my research, I reflected on and wrote about the participants’ routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships (Saldaña, 2016). A regular dialogue (as a list) regarding the code choices and their definitions was also kept as a mean to organize my research as I collected and coded data.

### **Coding**

“A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). I used affective coding methods as first cycle coding since my research is based on the relational aspects of teaching and learning. Affective coding methods, according to Saldaña (2016), “...investigate subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgments) by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences” (p. 124). Affective methods include emotion coding, values coding, versus coding, and evaluation coding. As my research focused on human interactions and emotional connections within the classroom, I began with emotion coding. “Emotion coding is appropriate for virtually

all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions, especially in matters of social relationships, reasoning, decision-making, judgment, and risk-taking” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 125). For second cycle coding methods, I employed pattern coding. “Pattern coding, as a second cycle method, is a way of grouping...summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236). I organized my coding process utilizing a qualitative coding program, NVivo.

After collected data from artifacts, interviews and observations had been coded, thematic analysis was used to identify themes within the data, which was used to inform the portraiture. Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). The collected and coded data from interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts was used to form individual and collective portraits of Ann and her students. The portraits detailed the relationships, interactions, thoughts, and experiences of each participant as they contributed to the educational environment. As consistent with portraiture research, “the portraitist draws out and constructs emergent themes using five modes of synthesis, convergence, and contrast” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 193).

### **Trustworthiness**

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research, I employed multiple cases, ensure triangulation of data sources, and used member checking to ensure that my interpretations of data were consistent with those shared by the participants. Glesne (2016) discusses trustworthiness as being “about the alertness to the quality and rigor of a study, about what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the research was carried out” (p. 53). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the use of triangulation of sources to establish credibility. Additionally, Merriam & Tisdell (2016) suggest including multiple cases to enhance the validity of a study. Implementing methods to ensure trustworthiness of the research enhanced the rigor and quality of this research and the findings.

The participants consisted of a total of eight (8) participants, with one teacher, Ann, and seven (7) of Ann’s students, Anthony, Gus, Hailey, Jafabian, Marcel, Morgan, and Victoria . Studying multiple cases allowed me to compare experiences and thoughts from student to student which enhanced the validity of this research. Additionally, data was collected in the form of observations, interviews, and artifacts. By collecting and analyzing three separate forms of data through triangulation methods, it strengthened the findings of this research, as each form of data had a different story to tell and different angles on which to view the experience. Member checking is another method that ensured the data I collected was accurate. I shared important pieces of data in the raw form with the Ann for her to give me feedback on accuracy, such as her interview transcript and field notes I took during my time in the field. Sharing these important documents allowed the participant to elaborate, clarify, and corroborate the data. Each of these measures strengthened the trustworthiness of this research.

Throughout the data collection process, I used great care to ensure the data was accurate, credible and trustworthy through triangulation, the study of multiple cases, and member checking processes. The use of encrypted, password protected digital transcription software added to the accuracy of the interviewing process and allowed me, as the researcher, to focus on the participants and their stories during the interviews. All collected data is kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home, and digital files are held in an encrypted, password-protected external hard drive also stored in a locked filing cabinet. Findings from the research were discussed with Ann to ensure the accuracy of their role within the study and to ensure findings were true to their experiences. Mindful of the protection of all participants, the final research piece uses pseudonyms for participants who elected to provide a pseudonym. Further, any artifacts from the participants were labeled with their chosen pseudonym and names of the school and district are omitted from any written documentation to protect the school and the participants. Routine review of procedures and practices throughout was conducted to ensure the ethical treatment of participants, the accuracy of the data collection, and dissemination of the findings.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

While this study covered the pertinent research questions and gave voice to the intricate relationships between students and teachers, there are a few limitations to this research. The first limitation involved the use of a charter school as the research site. Charter schools, while they are public schools, have a board of directors that is separate from the sponsoring school district, and, therefore, the teachers are employed by the board of directors for the charter school and not for the local school district. Within the

state of Florida, all teachers including charter school teachers must be certified within their subject area to teach. Another limitation of this study is that there was only one teacher who consented to participate in this research, which only provides a snapshot of one high school classroom. It would benefit future research endeavors to include teachers and students at varying levels from elementary through high school to provide broader perspectives.

Delimitations of this research include the limited number of participants and focusing on one high school classroom. This research focused on the raw interactions within the classroom of one (1) teacher and seven (7) of her high school students. Keeping the study small allowed me to get to know each participant enough to accurately portray their experiences through this portrayed case study and a fostered a deeper understanding of the relationships in the final years of a students' schooling experience. The student participants shared with me past experiences in the classroom as elementary, middle and high school students which provided rich data to better understand their current position within the classroom.

### **Review and Preview**

This chapter offered an outline of the methodology used in this research. The rationale of the study, research questions, and the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings were discussed along with an overview of the methodology, participants, ethical considerations. Data collection and analysis including coding procedures were also included. Finally, a detailed account of ensuring the trustworthiness and the limitations and delimitations concluded the chapter. The following section, *Chapter*



*Four: Findings*, details portraits of each participant with a culmination of the findings aligned with the guiding conceptual framework and research questions.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

Portraiture seeks to capture the raw emotions and experiences of the actors being portrayed by combining "...art and science, humanistic sensibilities, and scientific rigor. The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 3). According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016), the interpretation of the portrait lies with both the "producer and the perceiver," resulting in "co-construction of meaning" between the two parties (p. 29). The chosen methodology of portrayed case study combines the two methodologies of portraiture and case study, providing the backbone of this research.

This portrayed case study focused on one (1) teacher and seven (7) students within an alternative high school setting navigating dynamic personal relationships with one another. As the portraitist in this research, I echoed Lawrence-Lightfoot's search for goodness in the portrayal of the cases. "The portraitist's stance is one of acceptance and discernment, generosity and challenge, encouraging the actors in the expression of their strengths, competencies, and insights (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 141).

The following portraits aim to capture the intricate relationships and acts of caring that took place within the classroom, with the teacher at the center. As with all

portraiture, the interactions between the researcher and the participants and among the participants themselves help to paint the larger picture.

As Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) comments,

when the portraitist begins to shape the whole, she must identify the overarching story. Out of the torrent of data, the flow of perspectives and perceptions from the actors, the portraitist draws the emergent themes and organizes the multifarious threads of individual and collective experience. (p. 247)

Ann Black, the lone teacher participant, along with the seven students who consented to participate in this research each had beautiful and emotional stories to tell about their own navigation of relationships within the classroom. Each of the student participants attended Mrs. Black's Reading Intervention class for at least one hour each day. Some of the students have been with Mrs. Black for multiple years, while others are new to her classroom. I open this portraiture with a brief description of the school setting and the classroom followed by portraits of Ann Black and each of the student participants.

## **Setting**

### **The Research Site**

The charter school is in a coastal region of Florida and serves students in grades four through twelve (4-12) in an alternative school setting. Students can elect to attend the school or are referred by the school district for various reasons. Some students are sent to the school due to behavioral concerns while others attend to achieve credit recovery in order to graduate from high school. Additionally, students who are transferring out of the department of juvenile justice system attend the charter school

before being allowed back into their traditional neighborhood school, per an agreement with the local school district.

The school was one of the first charter schools established within the state after charter school law took effect in the late 1990s. It originally opened in a shopping center and, as the school grew, then it occupied a campus on the other side of town from where it is today. In 2013, the school moved to its current location in the center of town and draws students from all over the county. Most students ride buses owned and operated by the charter school to attend school each day and some bus rides are lengthy, as they come from opposite ends of the county.

The school is now housed in a mid-twentieth century, one-story brick elementary school building that the local school district donated to the charter school. The school facility was originally a district-run elementary school from the 1960s through the early 2000s. Due to a changing community population and an aging facility, the school site was undesirable for an elementary school and the school board decided to cease operations in the building. In the early 2000s, the building was renovated and retrofitted into satellite classrooms and offices for use by a local University.

Currently the building only houses the charter school, with few remnants of its past as an elementary school and a University satellite campus remaining. Some of the original fittings from the 1960s are still present within the school, such as the bathrooms which are adorned with pink tile and aqua sinks. Most of the classrooms, however, have updated fixtures with modern sinks, storage cabinets and interactive whiteboards. All classrooms have exterior doors which open to courtyards of grass and trees and a large, grassy playground area takes up the back portion of the lot. The entire campus connects

with covered, exterior breezeways which allow for students to be outside while they switch classes during the school day.

### **Ann's Classroom**

Ann Black's classroom is in building B next to one of the school's computer labs. The classroom reflects Ann's warm personality, with colorful seasonal décor throughout and bulletin boards celebrating student accomplishments. She teaches Title I Reading Intervention to middle and high school students and sees each of her students during one class period per day. Students are placed in her class because they struggle with reading and scored a level one (1) or two (2) in reading on the state assessment. Because not every student enrolled in the school needs to be assigned to Ann Black's Reading Remediation class, her class sizes are small, which is the perfect fit for students who need extra reading support.

Ann's classroom is cozy, and she goes out of her way to give the students a home-like learning environment, celebrating the students and providing a safe space for them to grow and learn. Ann designed her classroom with her students' needs in mind, providing alternative lighting such as lamps which eliminate the need for harsh fluorescent lighting and a kitchen table for a relaxing spot that calms students. The home-like classroom environment gives the students a comfortable place to be at school that feels more like a living room in a home rather than a classroom in a school. Ann even runs a wax warmer with seasonal scents to liven the learning atmosphere. Ann had vanilla scented wax melts filling the room one morning when I arrived and the students commented that her room smelled like cupcakes, so much so that they were convinced she had brought cupcakes to school. Additionally, the class pet who takes up residency in Ann's classroom, a beta

fish, has many different names each given by students. Ann says each student calls the fish something different and she allows that since she wants the kids to feel as though he is their personal pet. Some call him Bob, Fred, or Joe, while I heard others refer to him as Nemo and Gil. The students enjoy getting the opportunity to feed their class pet and the soothing waterfall that emits from the fish tank makes Ann's classroom inviting and seemingly calms the students.

The inspirational quotes and décor adorning the walls of Ann's classroom were carefully chosen to make students feel loved valued and secure in knowing they have an adult who cares. *Figure 3* shows the student celebration board Mrs. Black proudly displays behind her desk, showcasing graduation announcements and letters from former students. *Figure 4* depicts the colorful, warm puzzle corner Mrs. Black put together for her students to enjoy. In the background you will see newspaper clippings of student successes and stories written about the school. *Figure 5* lays out Ann's expectations of her students. *Figure 6* is a sign Ann keeps in her classroom that says, "You are loved." *Figure 7* is the birthday wall Ann uses to celebrate her students' birthdays. She told me that her students do not sometimes get celebrated at home, so she makes sure to buy each student a small birthday gift and bakes cupcakes for them to share with the class on their special day. She even celebrates her summer birthday kids at the end of the school year to ensure everyone feels celebrated. These gentle reminders throughout the classroom provide students with motivation and security knowing someone cares about them.



Figure 3. Student Celebration Board



Figure 4. Puzzle Corner

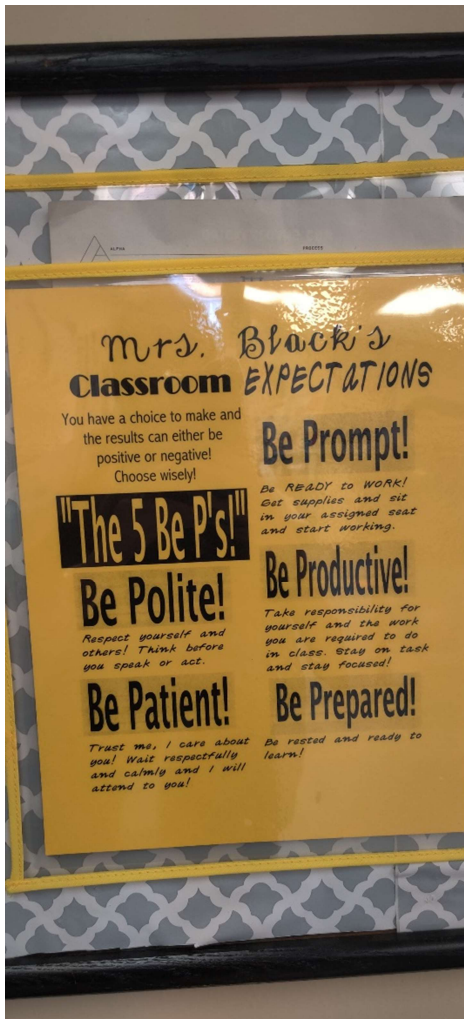


Figure 5. Classroom Expectations



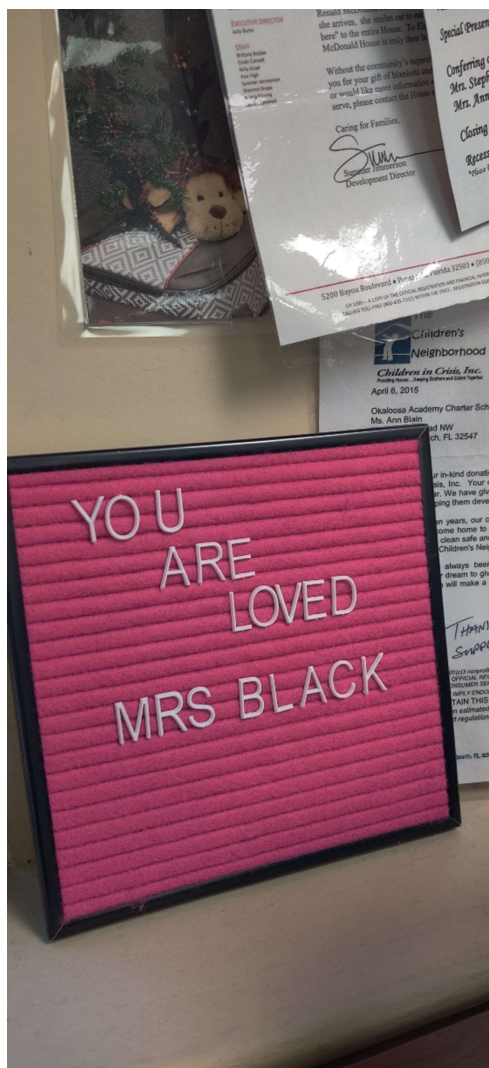


Figure 6. Classroom Décor



*Figure 7. Birthday Wall*

## **Ann**

### **Ann's Background**

Ann did not originally attend college to become a teacher. She went to school to study human growth and development with a focus on adolescents and teenagers, as she enjoyed the counseling side of working with children. Early in her career, Ann and her husband served in Arizona as youth leaders and counselors and Ann traveled the country doing fundraising for non-profit organizations that fostered literacy development for children and adults in other countries. She says her work was more of a mission to help others and she didn't think of it as a career choice. To make ends meet, she worked for

Sears as a telemarketer and worked her way up to a supervisor position over the 10 years she was with the company. Ann and her husband later adopted two infant daughters to complete their family.

When her daughters were in elementary school, Ann and her family relocated to Florida where she began substitute teaching. Ann found from her substitute teaching experiences that she greatly enjoyed being in the classroom and decided to pursue educator certification from the local university. This new-found career path fit nicely with her degree in human growth and development and Ann found that she could utilize her counseling experience in the classroom as well. Ann was hired at the present school six years ago and it is the only full-time teaching position she has held. She currently teaches middle and high school reading remediation. Speaking about why she prefers teaching high schoolers, Ann said:

I love that part of their life because they're mature enough to have a conversation about their future and they're really ready to learn... life is ahead of them and I just see that. I see it maybe sometimes more than they see it...encouraging them, challenging them, inspiring them, whatever it takes and saying, *you can do this in your future.*

Ann spent time researching challenging, yet engaging lessons for her students to keep the classroom experience fun for her students. She goes out of her way to plan innovative lessons that will hold her students' attention and provide them the tools they need to become successful readers. She had a class novel for each class period that she read aloud during the first 15 minutes of each class. During the time I was observing, her middle school classes were reading *Percy Jackson* and her high school classes were reading *Lord of the Flies*. Reading aloud, she says, is something that teachers stop doing as students get older, but Ann believes it continues to help her students' fluency and

vocabulary while providing them time to settle into class in a calming manner before the lesson begins. Classwork involved mini lessons surrounding the selected novels, which dove further into the characters, setting and plot of the story while expanding her students' vocabulary. *Figure 8* shows Ann preparing supplies for a slime-making assignment with her high school students. Students were expected to read and follow written instructions to create the slime.



*Figure 8.* Ann Black

### **Ann's Current Teaching Position**

Ann served as the school's Title I Reading Remediation teacher, teaching both middle and high school students each day. In addition to her teaching duties, she was the lead teacher and acted as a mentor to fellow teachers. In her six years at the school she has spent a lot of her own money purchasing classroom equipment, supplies for lessons, and extras for the school. Some of those extras include a school yearbook, which she and her husband fully funded for the students. Ann found that the students could not afford to purchase their own yearbooks, so she, with assistance from her Leadership class, created the content for the yearbook, had it printed and bound, and distributed free copies to each student. Ann shared with me that the yearbooks bring her joy and sadness, as she has had some students who have since been sentenced to prison or passed away, but she likes to look back on the memories of years past to see all of the students she has worked with over the years.

As part of her giving spirit, Ann is involved in planning the extra school activities such as the cultural fair, career fair, and Christmas festivities along with other various community outreach projects. She believes that students need to experience community events to be able to better plan for their future and become well-rounded citizens. *Figure 9* depicts a God's Eye craft a student made for the Día de Los Muertos Latina cultural day at the school. Each student chose their own project and followed directions to complete the project to present during the cultural day celebrating Latina culture.



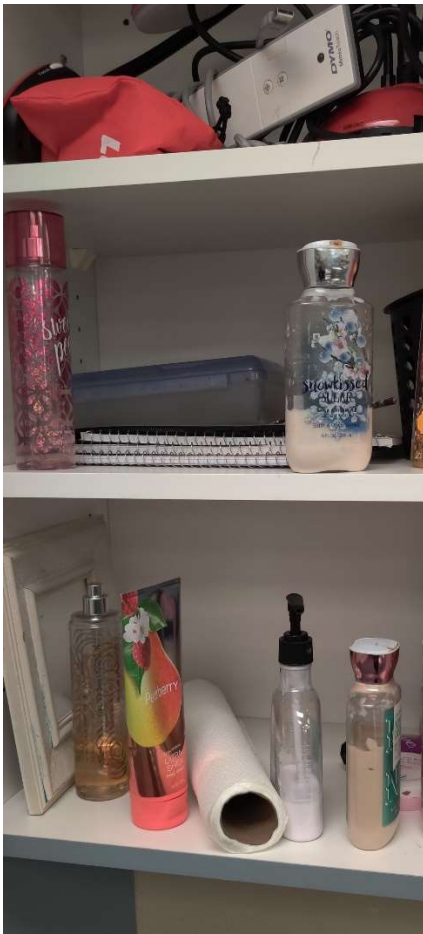
*Figure 9. Latina Cultural Day Craft*

Speaking of one of her favorite parts about teaching at this school, Ann said:

...We had our cultural fair last week and I love getting the kids excited about something different. We participate in the city Christmas parade, which we've won the best youth float for the last three or four years and the kids are so proud when they do things like that.

Another school-wide outreach project Ann holds near and dear to her heart is the comfort closet which provides students with clothing and toiletry items they may not have access to at home. Students can take what they need for free. This is a school-wide initiative and Ann is at the center of it. Additionally, Ann keeps a cabinet stocked with scented body sprays and lotions that students are free to use in her classroom.

Occasionally, students would visit her classroom just to use the scent cabinet even though they do not currently have Ann for any classes. Ann told me that the students deserve to feel good about themselves and that's why she provides the scents. *Figure 10* shows the scent cabinet in Ann's classroom.



*Figure 10.* Scent Cabinet

### **What it Means to Care**

Nel Noddings asserts, “An ethic of care embodies a relational view of caring; that is, when I speak of caring, my emphasis is on the relation containing carer and cared-for. Both carer and cared-for contribute to this relation (Noddings, 2005, p. xv). In an educational context a teacher espouses caring by, “making students do what is thought to be good for them” (Noddings, 2005, p. xiv). While observing and conversing

with Ann, she demonstrated her ways of caring and openly shared how caring influences her students, herself, and her teaching. An excerpt from our interview transcription follows:

Allison        How do you define caring (in general)?

Ann             ...caring is that you're thoughtful and you go out of your way to understand people. One of the things is to understand before having to be understood. And I think a big caring aspect is understanding where that person's coming from before—we're automatically super selfish beings and we want to be understood, we want our voice heard. But I need to understand where they're coming from. And I think that is, in general, caring.

Allison        Specifically, in education, how would you define caring?

Ann             I think one example that really hit me one year was a student standing up at the wall. And, of course, she was coming to my class and she just was down, and I started with, "What's been going on?" And she's goes, "Well, I don't know if I get home if my mom's going to be there." And I said, "Well, what's going on?" And she goes, "Well, she's going to court today, she might go to jail." And I thought about that and I thought I have never in my whole life ever had to face that situation. And it gave a huge perspective to me that, specifically, in education, but more importantly at our school, I had to see these kids beyond as a human being, just a hormonal teenager. But they have really major issues going on and maybe that's why they're acting out.

Allison        Does caring look differently with the at-risk student population than it would in a typical school population, how so?

Ann             I think it has to look differently because if I was in a normal school population and I can just relate it to my girls, I teach my girls that going to school and doing their homework and being respectful to their teachers is their job. A lot of these kids come into our school is just to get out of the house and it's a way to get away from their issues. So, when I'm looking at my girls, my personal children, I can't reflect that on to my students because my students don't have that—a lot of them are coming to our school to escape their problems. So, we're (the school) is the stability, we're the consistency. They get to eat at our school. I don't know if they go home and they're not eating. I think the caring aspect must look different because I know my girls are



going to get birthday presents...some of these kids, I've heard their stories about their parents not having the money or time to celebrate their birthday. I get all my students a birthday card and I give them candy or something else I know they want (something little.) So, I'm not going to assume they get that at home. I'm going to show them that I care about them and their birthday. So, I think with the kids in our population, you do have to show your care.

Allison Is it possible to teach someone to care? Is that a teachable thing?

Ann I think you can (teach someone to care), but by the way you care, because people want to know they can trust you. And most of the students in our school already don't have trust for anybody in authority for whatever reason. Either it's something that they've been taught, it's their culture, or they've been abused and betrayed by adults. With consistency in a teacher and showing them (the students) that you're going to be there you can teach them to care by modeling. An example is a student I had a few years ago. She'd just come to school and sleep in class whenever and I would just try. And I didn't know what to do and I just assumed she was just going to be the typical statistic. She even ran away and she was in Georgia somewhere. Then she comes back still struggling, but then last year she graduated. And she just did a huge 180. I mean she just flipped it around. And I had her every year and I just remembered being consistent with her, not dogging her for not staying on top of things. I mean she had all this potential. She wanted to go into the Military and all that. And I'd keep just encouraging her, "You can do this. You can do this." I saw her start to care- She even read a speech at graduation. She was a leader last year in our school. She would see the kid that was being picked on and she would go help them. I believe it's (the ability to care is) in them. It's just that they don't know how to express it because they're hurting so bad or whatever. I do think maybe by example and by just showing that we care people can be taught to care for themselves and others.

Allison What are the characteristics of a caring teacher?

Ann Well, (caring) is understanding your students and being patient. I think being a listener, listening, being aware of the what's going on with your students. We're talking about values in my leadership class. One of the values I told them that I really, really try to do is *kindness*. Because I feel like we lack kindness with this population. They're not very nice to each other...

- Allison      What does a caring relationship look like when you have that bond and that caring relation with the student?
- Ann            I think just being thoughtful, caring about the other person, or just as much as ourselves. I really feel like you got to love yourself before you can love other people because if you don't love yourself, then you can't love other people. [with my students] sometimes I realize I need to be soft-spoken...Talk to them at their level and be thoughtful that there's other things going on in their life and that might be why they're acting the way they're acting.
- Allison      Do you believe that the caring relationships between teachers and students are important for student success? Why or why not?
- Ann            It just depends on how much they're driven. I had a student two years ago; she had no family support whatsoever and super driven. She was able to do what she was supposed to do at our school, and she graduated. While going to school she was working and paying for her car and supporting herself with little support from family. We (her teachers) were her support network. After she graduated, she went into the military and reached out to me when she finished with boot camp. And I was like, wow, so proud of her! I'm sure that she had some people, but just from what she told me, whatever she had at the school, at that moment, that was it. That was what motivated her to continue... It's (grit/a drive) is in them already and they're going to persevere no matter what comes against them, but those, I think those students stand out because we don't see that very much.
- Allison      Do you think that a caring relationship with a teacher can kind of overcome that lack of drive? Can it jump start it for a student?
- Ann            I do think, but the kids that—the ones that I've experienced it with, they must be open and willing to the relationship. They'll come back at graduation and they'll say, "Thank you for helping me get through it."
- Allison      How do your students show that they care about you in your classroom?
- Ann            This morning as we were waiting for the buses—for everybody to come in, three middle schoolers came and stopped in my classroom. And I thought, "Well what are they doing here?" because I have high school first period. And they stopped in on the way to Miss D's classroom. And I'm like, "What are you guys

doing here?” “We just want to say hi.” And they came in and they’re asking questions. The first time they’ve done that. And I’m like, “Oh. That makes me feel good.”

Allison        How do the students show that they care about their peers?

Ann              I’ve seen they stick up for each other and they tell on each other. There was one year a boy was threatening to blow up the school and another boy was like, “I’m telling.” And he goes, “‘Snitches get stitches,’ but we don’t mess around with that stuff.” And so, he was like, “I’m protecting my school. I care about my school.” So, they do care, and they will stick up for their friends if someone’s being picked on. I’ve seen it many times.

Allison        How do you help students who are rejected by their peers?

Ann              I would have to say I talk to them. I show interest in them. And I try to make sure that they know I think they’re valuable...

During my time in Ann’s classroom, I observed her interactions with students and found that what she told me during her interview that caring involves *understanding before having to be understood* was repeatedly demonstrated within her interactions. There were days the students would act out and try to get a rise out of her, but she would take a step back and evaluate why they were acting that way before being reactive. One student was out of sorts one day, walking around the classroom and being generally disruptive. She pulled him aside to ask him what was going on. He confided in Ann that his mother hadn’t given him his medication for Attention Deficit Disorder in a few days and that he couldn’t control himself. To make matters worse, his prescription eyeglasses were broken in a fight a few weeks prior and he didn’t have new glasses because his mother couldn’t afford to purchase new ones and he couldn’t see the board without them. That same student told me that all he sees is “blurry” when it comes to seeing things at a distance. He was trying his best, but without being able to see the work and not having his medication he was out of sorts. Once Ann had the background

knowledge of his situation, she allowed the student to walk around the classroom while doing his classwork, as she knew he wasn't physically able to sit in his chair and focus. She even gave him a job that day to feed the class fish since he was already walking around. Meeting students where they were was essential for Ann to earn the respect and trust of her students.

### **The Students**

The middle and high school students who visit Ann's classroom each day are assigned to her class because they struggle with reading. Ann teaches three middle school class periods and three high school class periods per day. Since it is a small school, students are grouped in multi-age classrooms within their designation of either middle or high school, so middle schoolers are in mixed-age classes with students in grades 6-8 and high school students are placed in mixed-age classes with students in grades 9-12. Last year Ann taught only high school students, but due to lower enrollment numbers, the school combined the middle and high school reading remediation position and Ann took on both the middle and high school students. Some of her students have been held back academically and are older than their grade-level peers. Most, if not all, of the students enrolled at the school are designated as *at-risk* of dropping out of school for various reasons. Some are involved in gang activity and drugs, and some have criminal records.

### **Broken Kids**

*"I don't believe there's a bad kid..."*

Ann expressed to me the raw situations going on with the students at the school:

It's a lot of *broken kids*. Their lives are messed up but not all of them. I do think they all have a story. I would say majority of the kids that come to our school

have some kind of *brokenness* in their life. So, I feel like that plays into why they're at our school. I think those horrible situations that have happened in their life has just driven their behavior or their lack of education, and that's why they're at our school. I hate to say but sometimes I'm like, 'These kids are so bad.' But it's not them. *I don't believe there's a bad kid.* There's just a kid. Never a bad child but a child with troubles in their life and a lot of it is not their fault. Sometimes I feel like the drugs and the gang activity, those kinds of things, that really concerns me. I feel a little overwhelmed like, 'Is it ever going to get better?' I've been here long enough that we have lost students. We've had students die. I've been to funerals. I recently experienced that. I know that that is the reality. My heart is, 'Okay, what can I do to help?' But sometimes I don't know if I have the tools. I just don't know if I have the tools to help. Ann confided in me that the suicide rate among the student population is high and many kids are involved with gang activity and drugs. Most of the students come to the school to eat, as the free and reduced lunch participation is high. The students get two free meals at school, breakfast and lunch, and missing a day of school would mean no food. Students also get a backpack filled with food to take home for the weekend to feed the students and younger, non-school age siblings thanks to a non-profit group that sponsors the area schools. The poverty level is staggering in the community as a whole and the school population is reflective of that.

The students, Ann says, are products of their environment and some are being raised by parents or guardians who may or may not have graduated from high school and education simply is not a priority within the household. She said the teachers try desperately to break the poverty cycle with these students and give them hope for their futures. The teachers and school administrators tell students they have options such as trade school, military, and community college after they graduate to build a better life and future for themselves and their children. Graduating with a high school diploma is an accomplishment in and of itself for these students, as some will be the first of their family to attain that level of education. Speaking of working with her students daily to combat the negative cycles in their personal lives, Ann says, "I have to dig deep. There's a lot of things I do personally that I just try to prepare myself mentally to meet the challenges..."

### **Student Portraits**

During my time in Ann's classroom, I met many of her students in both middle and high school. Seven (7) of Ann's students consented to participate in my research after learning about the study. Anthony, Gus, Hailey, Jafabian, Marcel, Morgan, and Victoria were each considered high school students at the time of my research. *Table 2, Student Participants*, shows the students' names or chosen pseudonyms listed in alphabetical order, brief descriptions, and emergent themes of care. Ages, grade levels, and number of years attending the school are also included to provide a snapshot of each student.

Table 2

*Student Participants*

<b>Participant Name</b> <i>Descriptive Terms</i> <i>Emergent Themes of</i> <i>Care</i>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number of Years</b> <b>Attending the</b> <b>School</b>
<b>Anthony</b> <i>Class Clown;</i> <i>Anxious</i> Care as <i>Understanding</i>	14	9th	4
<b>Gus</b> <i>Shy; Determined</i> Care as <i>Helping</i> and <i>Being Present</i>	18	10th	5
<b>Hailey</b> <i>Brave; Quiet</i> Care as <i>Communication</i>	14	9th	1
<b>Jafabian</b> <i>Outgoing; Role</i> <i>Model</i> Care as <i>Trust, Doing</i> <i>the right thing, and</i> <i>Fairness</i>	19	10th	3
<b>Marcel</b> <i>Determined;</i> <i>Hardworking</i> Care as <i>Helping,</i> <i>Listening, and</i> <i>Fairness</i>	19	12th	2
<b>Morgan</b> <i>Resilient;</i> <i>Hardworking</i> Care as <i>Helping</i> and <i>Encouraging</i>	18	12th	5
<b>Victoria</b> <i>Intelligent; Funny</i> Care as <i>Respect,</i> <i>Understanding, and</i> <i>Helping</i>	14	9th	1

### **Anthony- Self-Described Class Clown and Anxious; Care as Understanding**

When I first met Anthony, he was seated in the back of the classroom, propped on the back legs of his chair rocking back and forth, listening to Ann teach while rhythmically tapping on his desk with his pencil. He was curious about me and why I was in the classroom and quickly struck up a conversation while he was supposed to be working on his classwork. He seemed to enjoy Ann's attention, as well, and was always the first to raise his hand in class. Anthony was a social kid; bright and inquisitive and didn't fit the mold of the typical students at the school, as he did not seem to get involved with the trouble some other kids found. I asked Anthony why he was referred to attend this school and he told me he was a class clown and they, meaning the school district, simply didn't know what to do with him. He was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade when he was sent to the alternative school and is now in 9<sup>th</sup> grade; he has been at the school for 4 years. Anthony confided in me that he preferred being at this school because he felt understood by his teachers, as he did not have that sense of belonging at his former elementary school. His quick wit and sense of humor routinely distracted those around him, but he had a light about him, and I could tell he was simply trying to deflect stress with his antics. *Figure 11* is a picture of Anthony. Since he exited from Ann's class in October, this is the only photo I was able to capture of him. Unfortunately, because he was removed from Ann's class prior to my student interview sessions, I also did not get an opportunity to interview Anthony. The transfer out of Ann's class was a positive situation for Anthony, as it meant he tested out of requiring the remedial reading support Ann offered.





*Figure 11. Anthony*

Ann rated each of her relationships with my student participants on the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A) and Anthony was the only one to score equal on both closeness and conflict ratings from Ann with scores of 23 respectively for closeness and conflict, meaning that they share a close relationship marred by an equal amount of conflict. According to the scale, Anthony thrived on praise from Ann and spontaneously shared information about himself revealing their closeness factors, but it was also noted that Anthony can drain her energy if he's in a bad mood and has a

tendency to be sneaky and/or manipulative with Ann. Ann also noted the following conflict factors that scored either a 4 or a 5 on the scale:

- Dealing with this child drains my energy
- When this child is in a bad mood, I know we are in for a long and difficult day
- This child is sneaky and/or manipulative with me.

Anthony was a relatively calm, easy-going kid from my observations, but he was also anxious and used humor to cope with the pressures from the peers surrounding him. Anthony was a good kid who tried to stay out of trouble, as his anxiety wouldn't allow him to partake in risky behaviors. He also seemed to have a support network at home with his mother and grandmother, both of whom were active in his life. I suspect that the relationships Anthony had at home helped him steer clear of negative behaviors.

#### **Gus- Shy and Determined; Care as Helping and Being Present**

Gus was sent to the alternative school five years ago, at the age of 13, because he was far behind in his middle school credits. When I met Gus, he was 18 years old and in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. He was raised in a household where English is not the primary language and had struggled throughout his school career, with reading being his toughest subject. Gus is a go-with-the-flow kind of person and has a calm demeanor. When his peers act up around him, he does not get involved and, instead, retreats more into his shyness, as he says it *annoys* him when his peers act out. He is eager to please his teachers and wants to succeed in all he attempts. More so, Gus is determined to graduate from high school in two years and will be the first in his family to do so. He will be 20 years old when he graduates if he sticks to his plan. Gus was one of two participants who elected not to allow photo or video during our time together, so I do not have a photo of Gus to share.

Within our interview session, I asked Gus what it meant to care about someone else and how people show they care. He responded, “To care for someone else, you be there for them, help them out if they need it.” He used his mother as an example of someone who helps him and cares about him. From our conversation, I gathered that he and his mother had a close, positive relationship. His general definition of care, noted above, was also used to describe caring between family members and friends as well as the care that a teacher shows their students. Care or the act of caring, according to Gus, did not vary from family to friends to teachers. When asked what a caring teacher acts like, Gus replied, “They help you on the work stuff.” He said an *uncaring teacher* would do the opposite and not help a student with their work and an *uncaring school* would let kids fail because they wouldn’t help them. A favorite teacher he discussed was a former math teacher who had since moved. Gus reflected on their relationship fondly as he said, “Mr. S helped me a lot on school stuff and was always there for me if I needed.” It didn’t hurt that math was a favorite subject of Gus’, but as he stated, the relationship with his teacher, knowing he would be there for him anytime, meant a lot to him personally.

When asked about his relationship with Ann, his eyes lit up and told me that she was very nice; One of his nicest teachers, in fact. He told me he knows she cares about him because she talked to him a lot, helps him, and generally cares for him. He indicated an overall positive relationship with Ann. Gus said he does think *some* of his teachers care about him, but with others he was not so sure where their relationship stood. He also told me that he likes receiving verbal praise from teachers and it makes him feel proud. Teachers who do not care, according to Gus, just do their own stuff and ignore the students.

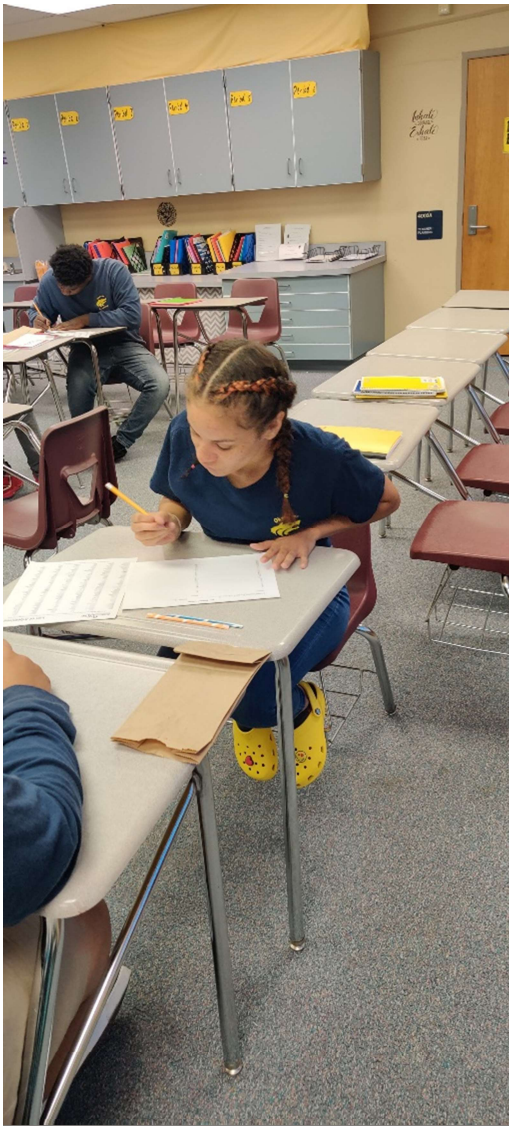
The definition of care for Gus was that his teachers were ready and willing to help him. In his personal life, Gus' definition of care remains consistent with *willingness to help and being present* remaining at the core. On the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A) Ann indicated a close relationship involving little conflict with Gus, with a score of 23 for closeness and 10 for conflict. He received the second lowest conflict score of any of my student participants. Although Gus is now legally an adult, the scale is still used to rate the relationship between Gus and Ann. The verbiage "child" within the scale is general to mean "student." The highest closeness factors indicated by Ann about Gus were as follows:

- This child values his relationship with me
- When I praise this child, he beams with pride
- This child spontaneously shares information about himself
- This child openly shares his feelings and experiences with me.

#### **Hailey- Brave and Quiet; Care as Communication**

Hailey was the first student to greet me when I arrived at the school for my first day of research. Hailey, a quiet girl with a beautiful smile, brown hair and freckles, met me in the school's front office and escorted me to Ann's classroom. Hailey was 14 when I met her and in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Building trust with Hailey took a while, but eventually she began sharing with me. She was new to the school, as she had previously lived in Illinois with her grandmother. After a bad experience with the alternative school she was attending in Illinois, Hailey decided to move back to Florida to live with her mother. She never told me why she ended up at an alternative school in Illinois despite my asking, but she did tell me that her mother went to her current school when she was a child so that is why she chose to attend when she moved back to Florida. Her family situation was

turbulent, and her siblings live in other states with different relatives, as her mother attempted to get her own life together. Hailey's decision to move back was a brave one and she gave up living with her primary caretaker since childhood, her grandmother, to make the move. *Figure 12* shows Hailey working on classwork with her partner.



*Figure 12.* Hailey

When asked what she thinks it means to care about someone, Hailey replied, “Someone that would be there for you and talk to you about stuff, and you can tell them stuff about you and them not go tell everybody about it.” She says with her family she

tells them she cares about them, so they know. When asked about how she would care for friends she confided in me that she doesn't have friends and she prefers to keep to herself. Hailey is a mature 14-year-old and has been through a lot in her life and I believe trust keeps her from seeking friendships. She says she has siblings, but they all live in other states, but told me she shows them she cares by texting or calling whenever she is able. Communication is paramount for Hailey's view of what it means to care.

The following is an excerpt of our interview dialogue:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Allison | What does a caring teacher act like?  |
| Hailey  | She would ask you like how you're doing every day or something like that.   |
| Allison | What does an uncaring teacher act like?   |
| Hailey  | Rude, doesn't check up on you, doesn't ask you if you need help.  |
| Allison | What does a caring school, like the classrooms, the buildings, the everything about it look like?                                   |
| Hailey  | I don't know.   |
| Allison | What does an uncaring school look like?   |
| Hailey  | Really messy with a lot of rude teachers at it.   |
| Allison | Do you have a favorite teacher?   |
| Hailey  | Yeah. Mrs. G. 7 <sup>th</sup> grade.  |
| Allison | Why was she your favorite teacher?  |
| Hailey  | 'Cause I just had a connection with her because her daughter was actually my best friend. So, I made a connection with the mom too. |
| Allison | Do you think Ms. Black cares for you?   |
| Hailey  | Yes, 'cause she always checks up on us to make sure that we're okay. And she always helps us on stuff too.                          |

Allison            How does that make you feel?

Hailey            It makes me feel happy.

Allison            How does she show that she cares about other students? Is it the same? Is it different?

Hailey            It's the same. She just makes sure that everybody's doing okay.

The root of care for Hailey involves *communication*. She cares for her family by talking to them and sees a teacher as caring if they ask how she is doing and checking on her to see if she needs help with something. Hailey, like Gus, also received high marks for closeness and lower marks for conflict with Ann, with a score of 29 for closeness and 13 for conflict according to the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A). Ann noted on the scale that Hailey will seek comfort from Ann when she's upset. Her other high closeness factors (rated 4 or 5) were:

- This child values her relationship with me.
- When I praise this child, she beams with pride.
- This child spontaneously shares information about herself.
- It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling.
- This child openly shares her feelings and experiences with me.

The only notable conflict factor between Hailey and Ann was, “when this child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day.”

**Jafabian- Outgoing Role Model;  
Care as Trust, Doing the Right  
Thing, and Fairness**

When I met Jafabian, he was beginning his third year at the school. He was 19 years old and in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. As a non-traditional student, he was there for credit recovery; To repeat courses he had previously failed and hopefully earn the credits he needed to graduate. He told me that people have told him he should just complete the eighteen credit hour diploma option and he could be finished quicker, but he told them

that wasn't good enough for himself and he will do the full twenty-four credit hour diploma because he wants to keep the door open to potentially apply to college. Although Jafabian hasn't ruled out going into the military or becoming an underwater welder, either. He is keeping his options open and has high standards for himself and his future.

Jafabian was originally sent to the alternative school because he got into fights at his previous school and was expelled. He told me that another student was attacking another student in class and Jafabian felt the need to stand up for the student who was being attacked. The attacker said he was going to beat him up for saying something and sure enough he approached Jafabian at lunch and took a swing at him. Jafabian fought back and he and the other student were expelled for their actions. He told me that now he sees the error of his ways and the fight could have been prevented had he not said anything to the kid in the first place, but he wanted to stand up for the kid who was being hurt. Despite his violent past, Jafabian really sees the good in everyone and wants people to do the right thing. It greatly bothers him when people treat others badly or they don't follow the rules at school.

From my observations, Jafabian was the center of the class social circle, being older than his peers, they looked to him for validation and support. Ann would sometimes ask Jafabian to help other students by using his influential prowess to help students who were struggling with behavior. His role was that of a big brother for some of the younger students and he was hand-selected for Ann's Leadership class to further develop his leadership skills. *Figure 13* is a picture of Jafabian completing classwork with a partner in Ann's class. Out of the seven student participants, Jafabian was the



most candid and forthcoming during our interview session. *Figure 13* is a picture of Jafabian completing classwork with a partner in Ann's class.



*Figure 13.* Jafabian

The following is a portion of my interview session with Jafabian:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| Allison  | In your own words tell me what it means to care about someone. It can be in your personal life, anything.                         |
| Jafabian | If somebody was to tell you—like this school, if somebody was to tell you something, don't go around telling their business. Show |

them that you have respect for them by not telling their business if they tell you, because if they trust you enough to tell you something that means they don't want nobody else to know...I stay out of the drama because, man, they can be your friend one day and the next day they your enemy.

Allison How do you show your family that you care about them?

Jafabian Sometimes my friends give me a call and want me to come hang out with them and I say, "No, I'm going to stay home and chill with the family," and stuff like that...Go to movies or the beach or something like that. Just spend time with them.

Allison How do you show your friends that you care about them?

Jafabian ...sometimes there's misunderstandings between them and somebody else and they'll be trying to fight my friend and then I'm like, "if you fight him you're going to have to fight me too," I say because there ain't no friend going one-on-one when I'm around because that's my friend. So basically, you fight one we all fight okay, so you do it as a group.

Allison What does a *caring* teacher act like?

Jafabian Somebody that helps you achieve grades, makes sure you're always on task, makes sure you're not doing something they don't expect you to be doing—doing your best. If they know you're not a bad kid, they're going to make sure and remind you how you used to do this and you're not a bad kid and stuff like that.

Allison What does an *uncaring* teacher act like?

Jafabian Someone who says, "I don't care. It's not my grade. You can sit there and not do nothing. I'll just fail you." And they don't show any type of caring for you as a student to push you and make you do work and stuff like that.

Allison What does a caring school look like/feel like?

Jafabian Everybody being positive. Everybody bringing everybody up. Everybody saying positive things about each other. Basically, everybody just showing that they care and love each other.

Allison What does an uncaring school look like to you?

- Jafabian Drama. This school. Some people care, but most people don't. One day they'll be your friends. The next day, they're your enemies.
- Allison That's among the students?
- Jafabian Yes, that's among the students. The teachers ultimately do show that they care. But the students don't think they care, and they just want to push them away and stuff like that.
- Allison Why do you think they push the teachers away?
- Jafabian I feel like, I don't know. Maybe they reached a rough patch in their life and they don't trust anybody, or they have trust issues or something like that.
- Allison Think about all your past school experiences. This can be anything from preschool on up, here or other schools you've attended. Do you have a favorite teacher?
- Jafabian Yeah, my kindergarten teacher. Her name was Miss Davis. And my third-grade teacher, Miss C.
- Allison What makes her your favorite?
- Jafabian Because they knew like—they would help me on my work. They wouldn't BS me and just give me the runaround and stuff like that. And they knew that ultimately, whatever needed to be done I would do it and stuff like that. So, they didn't add pressure on me or try to degrade me in any way.
- Allison Do you think your teacher, Miss Black, cares about you?
- Jafabian Yeah. I think ultimately some people thinks she doesn't care. And some think she's racist—they're idiots. She shows that she cares because she's always there. She helps us with work. She just tells us she wants us to do better and stuff like that.
- Allison Do you think your other teachers care about you?
- Jafabian I don't know. I think some of them do because they're always reminding me, "you shouldn't be doing this. You should be leading by example." Miss C, she'll be like, you're a leader and they're just following whatever you do. And I said, well, I understand what you're saying, but ultimately that's their decision to make and they are their own person.

- Allison            When you do something good in class, how does Ms. B reward you?
- Jafabian           Like if we get high grades, sometimes she rewards us with a snack or something. She asks us what snack we want. She praises us in morning meetings with the other teachers, and stuff like that.
- Allison            What is your favorite thing about Ms. B?
- Jafabian           No Drama. You come in and get to work.
- Allison            What is your least favorite thing about Ms. B?
- Jafabian           I think sometimes she can be green to certain situations. Green is like, basically, being a hypocritical individual. “Oh, you’re being green.” Like if the teacher tells me to sit down, but the other kid is standing up... That’s green.

From our conversation, Jafabian includes *trust*, *doing the right thing*, and *fairness* as essential factors in caring. Care from teachers, according to Jafabian, is portrayed by pushing him to do his best and keeping him accountable. Care for peers is shown by not talking about others and keeping secrets. It also involves standing up for fellow peers and not letting a friend fight alone. Jafabian shares a positive relationship with Ann, as indicated by the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A.) The closeness factor Ann indicated is 28, whereas the conflict factor is 14. Although Jafabian is now legally an adult, the scale is still used to rate the relationship between Jafabian and Ann. The verbiage “child” within the scale is general to mean “student.” Some of the top-rated closeness factors are as follows:

- This child values his relationship with me.
- When I praise this child, he beams with pride.
- This child spontaneously shares information about himself.
- It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling.
- This child openly shares his feelings and experiences with me.

**Marcel- Determined and Hard-Working; Care as Helping, Listening, and Fairness**

Marcel, like Jafabian, is another non-traditional student. He is 19 years old, currently a senior, and has been at the alternative school for two years. When I first saw Marcel, he was twirling his brown curly hair with a pencil, slouched back in his chair, listening to Ann read from the *Lord of the Flies*, their class novel. He confided in me that he was sent to the alternative school because of a disagreement with a teacher at his former high school. He was trying to charge his cell phone in the classroom and the teacher got upset and sent him to the office. Marcel thought this was unfair because he had seen other students do the same with no punishment; He felt as though he was singled out and harshly punished. He was on a behavior plan at his previous school before that incident occurred and the encounter with that teacher was the final behavior mark to get a referral to the alternative school. However, Marcel said he has had a good experience at the alternative school and wished he would have transferred sooner. His younger brother had also since electively transferred to the alternative school since Marcel had a good experience.

Marcel had completed all his high school credits but had been unable to earn a passing score on the state-mandated reading assessment, which is a graduation requirement within the state of Florida. He has attempted to pass the exam twice so far. He attended school part-time for one class per day, Ann's reading remediation course, in hopes of passing the state-mandated reading assessment so he could officially graduate. At the time of my research, Marcel was receiving MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) services through the school in hopes of helping him by identifying if he

qualified for special education services. If a learning disability were to be found during this process, qualifying for services, and obtaining an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) could help Marcel by potentially waiving the state reading assessment graduation requirement. The school had been working on the MTSS support since shortly after he arrived at the school and Ann told me she was baffled as to how he made it as far as he did in school with no one screening him at his previous schools.

Marcel lived with his mother and brother and his mother drove him to school, an hour-long round trip, so he could attend class for one hour each day. When he's not attending school, Marcel works a full-time job at a fast food restaurant. He did not consent to the use of photo and video, so I do not have photos of Marcel to include.

Below is an excerpt from the interview session between Marcel and I:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Allison | what does it mean to care about someone? You can give examples from your personal life.                                 |
| Marcel  | Well, to care is spend time, help them with stuff they need, just knowing what they need and helping.                   |
| Allison | How do you show your family that you care about them?   |
| Marcel  | Well, I show my mom that I care for her. I just do whatever she asks like chores and make sure my stuff is picked up... |
| Allison | How do you show your friends that you care about them?  |
| Marcel  | I kind of keep to myself and don't really have friends.   |
| Allison | What does a caring teacher act like?  |
| Marcel  | She goes out of her way, goes out of their way to help the students who need help.                                      |
| Allison | What does an uncaring teacher act like?   |
| Marcel  | Yeah, the ones that—the ones that single out people.  |

- Allison      What does a caring school like the classroom, etc., look like?
- Marcel      Well, stuff that has the posters and all the decorations and all stuff like that.
- Allison      What does an uncaring classroom or school look like?
- Marcel      hmmm I don't know.
- Allison      Think about your past school experiences either here or other schools that you've attended throughout your life. Do you have a favorite teacher?
- Marcel      I ain't going to lie to you. Ms. Black is favorite teacher.
- Allison      Why is she your favorite teacher?
- Marcel      Well, Ms. Black is—she shows initiative. I mean, when I'm struggling, she's there. When I did something good, she's proud of me. She pushes me and stuff like that.
- Allison      Give examples of how your *other* teachers show they care. Because it could be different than what Ms. Black does.
- Marcel      Some of the teachers that I knew that cared about me always helped me when I needed help as well.
- Allison      How does Ms. Black reward you in class? How does it make you feel?
- Marcel      Sometimes she gives candy. Sometimes she's like just rewards us with good compliments and stuff like that.
- Allison      Do you have any teachers that you have something you really don't like about them?
- Marcel      I didn't like Mr. M last year a lot because he was just always yelling. He wouldn't listen to my side of the story. He would just always yell.

Marcel's themes of care involve *helping*, *listening*, and *fairness*. Above all else, Marcel values his relationship with Ann and finds that her way of caring for her students fits well with what he needs from a teacher. He appreciates that she takes the time to push him to be his best and is there when he's struggling. Marcel scored the lowest of any

of the student participants on the conflict rating on the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A.) Although Marcel is now legally an adult, the scale is still used to rate the relationship between Marcel and Ann. The verbiage “child” within the scale is general to mean “student.” Closeness was high, as well, with a score of 28. The highest closeness factors reflected from Ann’s survey for Marcel are as follows:

- I share an affectionate/warm relationship with this child.
- This child values his relationship with me.
- When I praise this child, he beams with pride.
- This child spontaneously shares information about himself.
- It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling.
- This child openly shares his feelings with me.

**Morgan- Resilient and Hard-Working; Care as Helping and Encouraging**

When I met Morgan in August, he had his head down, propped on his arms, and was sleeping in class. I observed Ann quietly nudge him awake as she read aloud from their class novel. She didn’t miss a beat reading aloud as she woke him. Morgan attended Ann’s first period class and Ann knew he had worked late at his job the night before, waiting tables. She hesitated to wake him and waited until the end of the read-aloud so he would get some rest but wouldn’t miss an opportunity to complete the classwork that day. Morgan was an 18-year-old senior and was set to graduate in December. He had attended the alternative school for five years and had been in Ann’s reading remediation course for four of those five years.

Morgan was originally sent to the alternative school for credit recovery. He caught up with his academics and was set to graduate in December, only one semester behind his peers. His family life was turbulent, as he had recently lost his father and he and his siblings moved in with their grandmother. Morgan confided in me during our



interview session that he comes from a large family with seven siblings and he falls somewhere in the middle of the children. After his father passed away, he had taken on more of a parenting role with his youngest siblings who were in elementary school at the time. Despite his family situation, Morgan was determined to graduate and start a career. With encouragement from the school administration and guidance counselor, Morgan enrolled in a vocational program that allowed him to study plumbing, which followed in his late father's footsteps. He attended the alternative school for half of each day and the rest of his days were spent at the vocational school, perfecting his trade. *Figure 14* is Morgan reading his classwork. *Figure 15* shows Ann playing banana grams with a small group in rotation stations with Morgan. Ann routinely structured classwork to encompass small group activities, called rotation stations. Ann would play along in the Banana Gram station where she would challenge students to try to beat her creating words and phrases from letter tiles.

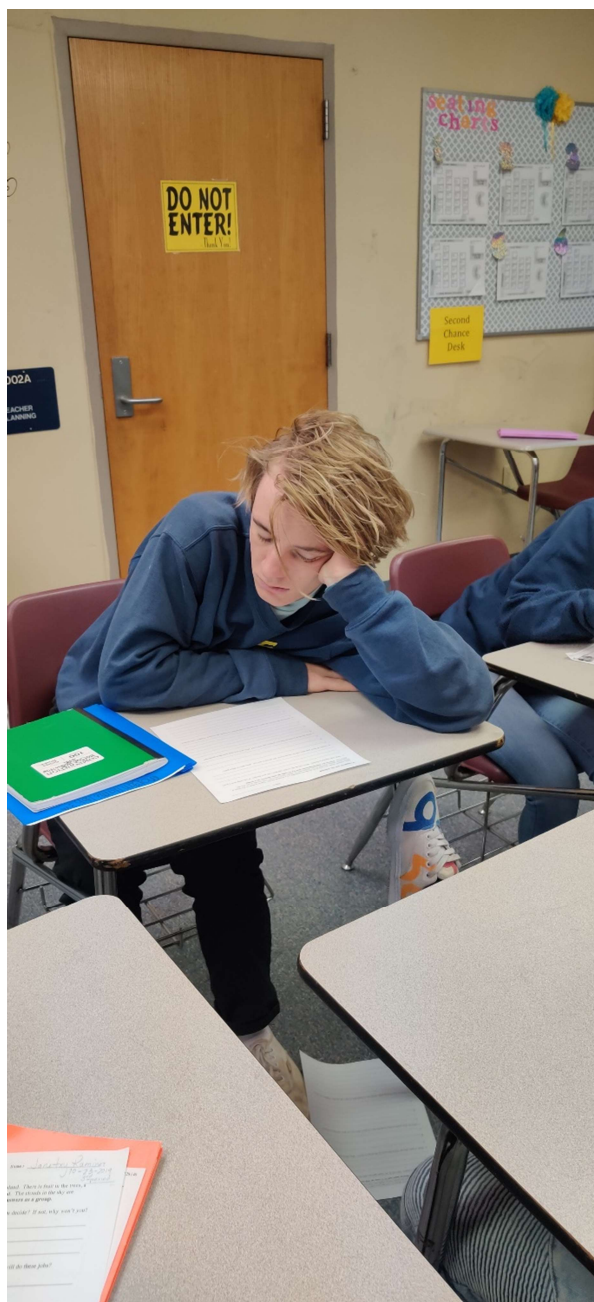


Figure 14. Morgan

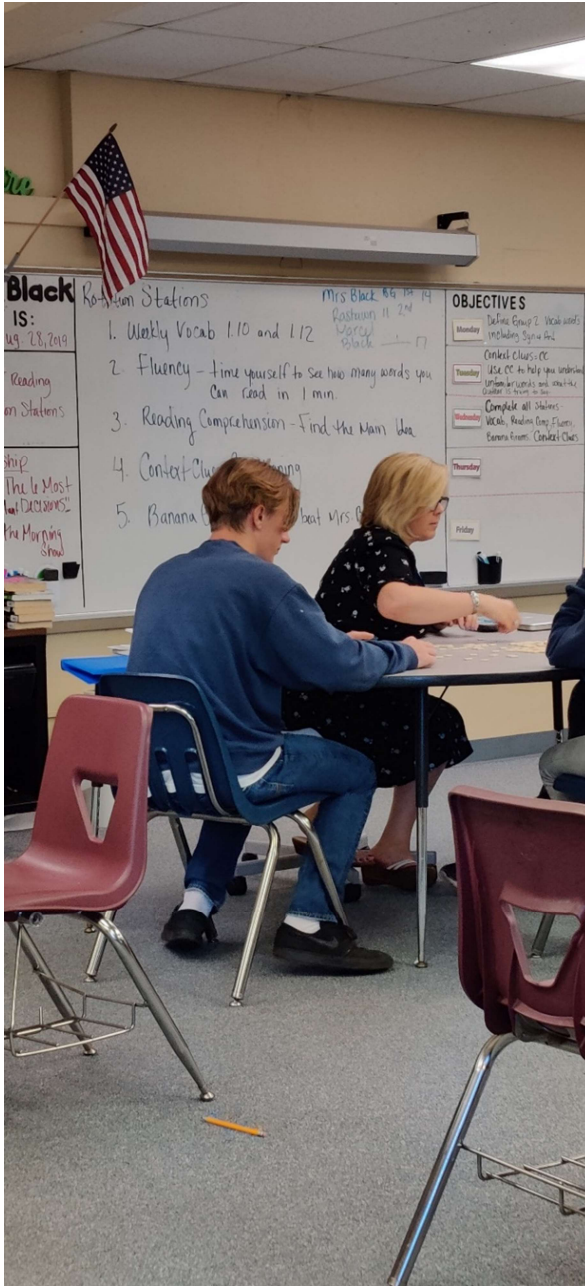


Figure 15. Ann and Morgan

During our interview session, Morgan told me that he believes Ann cares about him and her other students. Morgan told me that in order to show you he cares about someone, he tries to understand how they feel and respond to their needs by doing things the other person would like, such as helping them. The example he used to show care for

his family was doing the dishes and cleaning up around the house for his grandma. The following is an excerpt from our interview session:

- Allison        What does a caring teacher act like?
- Morgan        They help you with your work and your school.
- Allison        What does an uncaring teacher act like?
- Morgan        Doesn't care, just lets you sleep in class, I guess [laughter].
- Allison        What does a caring school, like the classroom, etc. look like?
- Morgan        Feel good. I mean, make you want to come to school more.
- Allison        What would an uncaring school look like?
- Morgan        Dirty, I guess. It wouldn't look nice from the outside or the inside, just trashy.
- Allison        Think about your past school experiences, either here or other schools you've attended, do you have a favorite teacher?
- Morgan        Miss Black.
- Allison        And why is that?
- Morgan        She helps me do my work and just helps me get to stuff, I guess. She wants me to succeed in life and be somebody.
- Allison        And what about your other teachers you've had in the past? Like in elementary or middle school- Did you have any teachers that you considered to be a favorite teacher? Tell me about them.
- Morgan        Miss J. in elementary school because she helped me with my reading comprehension. I was bad at it.

Care, for Morgan, involves doing things for other people they would appreciate.

In the classroom setting, care from a teacher takes the form of *helping* Morgan with his schoolwork and *encouraging* him. He said Ann is one of his favorite teachers since she shows she believes in him and wants him to succeed in life. Ann shares a relatively

positive relationship with Morgan, as indicated on the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A), With a score of 29 for closeness and 12 for conflict. Although Morgan is now legally an adult, the scale is still used to rate the relationship between Morgan and Ann. The verbiage “child” within the scale is general to mean “student.”

Some of the higher-ranking closeness factors with Morgan include:

- I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child.
- This child values his relationship with me.
- When I praise this child, he beams with pride.
- This child spontaneously shares information about himself.
- It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling.
- This child openly shares his feelings and experiences with me.

**Victoria- Intelligent and Funny; Care as Respect, Understanding, and Helping**

Victoria was 13 when I met her, she was about to turn 14 a couple of weeks into the new school year. She had just begun her freshman year at the alternative school after being referred during the previous spring. She confided in me that this was the second time she had attended the alternative school; the first time was two years ago for fighting and the second, current, time for keeping prescription medication in her locker. Victoria struck me as a smart girl who liked to push boundaries. *Figure 16* shows Victoria showing off her completed slime-making project.



*Figure 16. Victoria*

The first day I arrived, Victoria asked me what my name was and why I was there. She was interested in research and being a graduate student and what that all meant, as she had her own aspirations to attend college one day. She was quick to tell me that her mom and I share the same first name and she thought that coincidence meant she should be in my study. She took a consent form home and returned it the very next day with her mother's signature. She informally told me that she and her mother weren't

close, and her family situation was fractured. Her parents had divorced a few years prior and her mother had re-married and she lived in a home with her mother, father, and stepfather. She said she had step siblings, but they were grown and not living at home. Victoria desperately wanted to move out with only her father, as she did not like living with her mother and stepfather.

Out of all the student participants, Victoria was the most open and candid with me. I noticed Victoria was absent for some time during my data collection window. She told me upon her return that she was suspended from school for two weeks because she was involved in a fight with other girls on the school bus. The fight and resulting suspension lengthened the time she needed to stay at the alternative school on a behavior contract before she would be welcomed back to her zoned high school, but that notion did not seem to faze her. Victoria was happy to share her thoughts with me during our interview session. The following is an excerpt from our interview transcription:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Allison  | In your own words, tell me what it means to care about someone.  |
| Victoria | Somebody who looks out for you and doesn't want you to do bad. Someone who wants you to do good and succeed.   |
| Allison  | Can you give me an example of something in your personal life of somebody you care for or somebody who cares for you and how they care for you?  |
| Victoria | Austin. My boyfriend. He just looks out for me. If we're outside of school or whatever, on the weekend. There was this thing going on, and there's these guys or whatever who had guns and stuff. And he completely kept me away from that. He doesn't bring me in to that type of stuff. He keeps me away from all the bad stuff. And at school, he's kept me from fighting so many people. |
| Allison  | So how do you show your family that you care about them?<br>[Victoria gave me a look and I could tell talking about her family was difficult.]   |

- Victoria I don't know. I do what I'm supposed to do. I have my room clean. It's never clean.
- Allison How do you show your friends that you care about them?
- Victoria Make sure they don't do stupid stuff to get them in trouble at school.
- Allison What does a caring teacher act like?
- Victoria They want you to succeed with your grades. They want you to get up and do your classwork. Those kids that sleep every day, they just don't care. If I ever fall asleep in class, Ms. Black is quick to wake me up within a good 10 minutes.
- Allison What does an uncaring teacher act like?
- Victoria They just don't care. They don't do nothing. They don't help you. They don't look out for you.
- Allison Can you tell me about a past school experience you may have had with a teacher? Good or bad. It could be here; it could be any of your schools that you've attended.
- Victoria Okay, there was a substitute here for Ms. S. And it was my first day-- my first two days she was here. I'll always remember this. I was there and we were eating lunch. And she was sitting at my table, and I didn't really know anyone here, I was like, "Wow." So, it was just me and her sitting at the lunch table and she was telling me about how not to become like these other kids, trying to do good to get out of here. Look where I am now, still stuck here. But I'll remember that. She was nice, and then she quit because all the kids were awful.
- Allison How did that encounter make you feel?
- Victoria Good, I guess. I mean, it kind of helped. I was good last year. I did not get in trouble. I always had my shirt tucked in; I always had my belt. No holes in jeans.
- Allison Do you have a favorite teacher? Why are they your favorite?
- Victoria Probably Ms. Black. She actually cares. She's not rude like most teachers. But obviously if the kids are not respecting her, she'll get mad; yell or something. But she respects us; we respect her.



Allison           What about in your elementary and middle school years? Did you have a favorite teacher then?

Victoria           Let me think who my favorite one is they all hated me. I was annoying as a kid [laughter]. But probably Miss C. when I was in fourth grade. She was my favorite because she was just really nice, and she understood what was going on. Because I had a lot going on. In middle school my favorite teacher was probably my math teacher-- my algebra teacher from last year, Miss L. I loved her because she was always looking out for me, and whenever that I was going through something like a hard time, she would talk to me about it.

Victoria had a difficult time relating care to her family during our conversation; I expect due to the fractured relationships within her household. She did, however, enjoy talking about the ways in which her boyfriend shows he cares for her and how her teachers believed in her. Her favorite teachers have been those who were available to listen and understood where she was coming from at the time. Themes of caring for Victoria include *Respect*, *Understanding*, and *Helping*. Ann's relationship with Victoria, as noted on the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A), was unique in that she scored the highest for closeness of any of the other student participants, but also the highest level of conflict. Closeness was ranked at 32, whereas conflict was 23. The following received high marks for *closeness*, according to the scale:

- I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child.
- If upset, this child will seek comfort from me.
- This child values her relationship with me.
- When I praise this child, she beams with pride.
- This child spontaneously shares information about herself.
- It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling.
- This child openly shares her feelings and experiences with me.

The following categories received high marks of *conflict* according to the scale:

- This child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined.
- When this child is in a bad mood, I know we are in for a long and difficult day.
- This child is sneaky or manipulative with me.

### **Emergent Themes**

While each participants' story is detailed within their own separate contexts, their powerful portraits weave together to provide a cohesive picture of what caring and relationships mean within an educational environment. It is important to note that while each participant provided their own ideas of what it means to care, there is no right or wrong answer to the questions such as, "what is care?" and "what does a caring relationship look like?" Each participant is a product of their life experience. Care is personal; experienced and received through a variety of means and what is caring to one person may not be perceived as caring for another. As Noddings (2005) said,

If for whatever reason, the cared-for denies that she or he is cared for, there is no caring relation. When that happens it is not necessarily the fault of the carer...It may not be the fault of either the carer or the cared-for....In many of our schools today, we find teachers who are trying to care and students who want to be cared for, and yet many of those students claim, 'Nobody cares!' (xv).

As Noddings (2005) pointed out, there is often a mismatch of expectations and experiences of care. We must understand the roots of care and relationships to better provide teachers with the tools to reach their students on a personal level. This present research aims to bridge the gap of what is known about student-teacher relationships and brings into focus the act of caring within the classroom to mutually benefit teachers and the students they serve.

The portraits of Ann and her students highlight the importance of caring relationships and the impact on teachers and students within the educational landscape. The emergent themes were highlighted throughout my research and help to categorize the understandings of care and relationships in an educational context. While the emergent themes, noted below, intersected among participants, the experience of care and relationships remained personal in how they navigated and accepted or not accepted the care from one another. Themes are unpacked and analyzed using an interpretivist lens with a base rooted in the philosophical foundation of constructionist theory and related to the theoretical underpinnings of Care Theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005), and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985, 2000, 2017). A list of emergent themes follows:

- Peer Relationships
- Student-Teacher Relationships
- Care as Understanding
- Care for Success
- Care as Respect and Fairness

### **Peer Relationships**

**Anxiety and isolation.** The navigation of peer relationships came into focus as I observed in the classroom and conducted interviews with each student. Peer relationships were shown to be important for all students within this study, although some of the students expressed reluctance to pursue meaningful friendships with their peers. *Anxiety* and *Isolation* was expressed by multiple students throughout my research and I observed many other students, who were not participants, remain outsiders among their peers. Some of the students, I suspect, were experiencing attachment issues resulting from childhood experiences with trusted caregivers that were preventing them from

pursuing meaningful relationships with their peers. Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1958, 1969, 2005) argues that children who had the attachment to their primary caregiver (thought to be mother) disrupted in any way would have consequences on future relationships and attachment to others. The primary attachment (the mother) acted as a "prototype" for all future attachments, according to Bowlby. Many students reported they had only a few friends or none at all, however, all expressed that they would care for their peers if it were needed.

**Standing up for peers.** Even with the disconnect of meaningful peer relationships, the students expressed the ways in which they cared for their peers, which were similar to one another. I interviewed Ann prior to conducting my student interviews and she told me that the students acted as a group when they felt an adult "wronged" them and that was how she knew they cared for one another. They also used this group approach with their peers, which sometimes would result in a fight in or outside of school. As Jafabian said, "If one fights, we all fight..." I also observed the group-mentality among the students during my observations within the classroom. This group reaction is viewed as a component of the student culture. It was also noted by the participants that keeping secrets for peers was important for their relationships. Jafabian told me that if someone tells him a secret that they don't want anyone to know about, keeping that secret was extremely important to maintain trust and friendship.

*Fairness* was a huge theme within caring, according to the students. They valued teachers who were fair and would not hesitate to stick up for their peers if they felt a teacher was unfair to one of their peers. The entire class would join in against the teacher and the perceived "unfairness." Further, Ann said the students would also occasionally

tattle on one another to keep a peer from further wrongdoing. It wasn't malicious, she said, as the tattling was usually done to protect a peer from getting into further trouble by bringing it to the attention of an adult. Although the students seemed to lack meaningful peer relationships, they showed they cared for one another by acting as a group to protect from perceived unfairness and kept secrets as a way of maintaining trust with their peers.

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

**Reluctant students.** Student and teacher relationships are as unique as the individuals negotiating the relationship. What one may see as a positive relationship, another may not view it as a relationship at all. Within the context of this research, the relationships formed between Ann and her teenaged students were ever-changing to best meet the immediate needs of her students. As described in the previous section, the students I observed struggled to forge meaningful peer relationships and forming relationships with adults proved just as difficult for some. The students' individually navigated relationships with Ann were no exception. As Ann said, "I have to dig deep (to meet the daily needs of my students.)" Although Ann had known some of her students for years, she was always trying to find new ways to reach the reluctant teenagers.

**Meeting students where they are.** Ann consistently demonstrated her ability to listen, evaluate, and act when it came to her students. She would meet them where they were on any given day. If it meant an entire class was out of sorts and not listening to a word she said, she would throw out her lesson for the day and re-invent her lesson based upon the immediate needs of her students. For some of her students, she said, were preoccupied with larger issues at home that made them tune out at school. If student behavior warranted more one-on-one time with the teacher, Ann would accommodate.

For all of the student participants, Ann represented a trusted adult. Some talked about her as a favorite teacher, whereas others described her as “nice.” Students said they knew Ann cared about them because she *helped* them, *talked* to them when they were having a bad day, and, most importantly, they knew she *believed in them* and wanted them to succeed. For some of the students, they reported that previous teachers at other schools did not see anything in them and were quick to dismiss them. Ann, they said, truly cared about them and wants to see them graduate and do great things with their lives. Students said they like attending Ann’s class because they know she cares.

### **Care as Understanding**

Care or the act of caring for another was personal for all participants. According to Ann and many student participants, the definition of care includes understanding. *Understanding* to Ann meant that she took the time to listen to her students and to understand the root of a students’ misbehavior and/or reluctance to complete classwork. With that understanding came compassion and Ann used that as a tool to better reach the students where they were in the moment. To her students, understanding meant knowing their needs and Ann, they said, understood them enough and respected them. Anthony, although I did not get to formally interview him, told me that he knows Ann cares because she understands his humor and doesn’t get mad at him for cracking jokes or distracting a classmate with his harmless antics. Anthony is a self-described class clown and he says that messing around in class is what got him referred to attend the alternative school in the first place. He believes Ann sees his humor as part of his persona and respects him for who he is. I observed Ann quietly laugh at some of Anthony’s antics and she would give him a look that meant he needed to focus and get back to his

schoolwork, but she didn't show anger toward him. She never called him out in front of the class; Just a silent glance was all she needed to get him back on track. That glance represented that she understood his need to make others laugh, but it was time to get serious about his schoolwork.

### **Care for Success**

Intrinsic motivation to succeed, according to the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) indicates self-regulation and motivation for learning is influenced by the factors of *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*. The *relatedness* factor of the SDT encompasses the need for a caring relationship with a teacher to receive the encouragement necessary to succeed. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) state, "Strategies for enhancing relatedness include conveying warmth, caring and respect to students" (p. 141).

Care for success was indicated as highly important for the student participants. When speaking of what it meant for a teacher to care for their students, all mentioned that the teacher must show they want the student to succeed. The theme *care for success* also encompasses care as *helping*, as students saw teachers who helped them with their schoolwork as caring for their success. *Encouragement* in the forms of verbal or written praise or a simple "*I believe in you*" was also ranked highly as an indicator a teacher cares for the success of their students. The students noted simple acts of care for their success encouraged them to work harder and enhanced the relationship with their teacher.

### **Care as Respect and Fairness**

*Respect* was interwoven into each theme of caring I observed, and *fairness* showed to be essential for gaining respect from the students. Respect encompasses

understanding one another, as noted previously. Students who did not feel respected by their teacher often expressed a disconnect and the student would say things such as, “*that teacher was mean*” or “*they just didn’t believe in me.*” Throughout the portraits, the importance of respect comes through on all levels from Ann and each of her students. Findings show that students need to feel valued and respected to forge any type of positive relationship with a teacher or caregiver. *Fairness*, as discussed relative to *Peer Relationships* above, played a large role in students’ trust of a teacher. Teachers that students perceived as unfair were not favorites, as the students did not feel as though they could trust them. The students also expressed a reluctance to trust teachers who did not show fairness to all students.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to explore the dynamic caring relationships that exist within an educational context and how those relationships impact teachers and the students they serve. The following research questions provided direction for this research and were at the center of the design, data collection, and analysis procedures:

- Q1     What is the nature of caring student-teacher relationships?
- Q2     How do teachers perceive caring student-teacher relationships to impact themselves and their students?
- Q3     How do students perceive caring from their teachers?

Q1 What is the nature of caring student-teacher relationships? Student and teacher relationships are as complex as the individual players. Findings show that, in general, *caring* student-teacher relationships, at the very minimum, involve *understanding, respect, and kindness*. It is also noted, as Noddings (2005) says, that caring must be received by the other person in order for it to complete a cycle of caring.



Ann and her students navigated different relationships as described within the portraits, each with their own varying levels of closeness and conflict as rated on the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Appendix A.)

Students expressed to me that they have encountered *uncaring* teachers during the course of their school careers, however, Ann was *not* perceived as uncaring, as the students viewed her as a caring teacher who had their best interests at heart. According to the students, the *uncaring* teachers they have encountered are *rude, lack communication with students, and show unfairness and favoritism*. Students also reported they did not feel as though they had relationships with teachers who they found to be uncaring; They would simply attend class but did not feel any meaningful connection to the uncaring teacher.

Q2 How do teachers perceive caring student-teacher relationships to impact themselves and their students? Through the portraits, findings show that Ann truly cared about each of her students and reached deep to meet their individual needs each day. Although the emotional demands of Ann's students would overwhelm her some days, she would try harder the next day to better anticipate and meet their needs. Ann expressed to me that she would have to "dig deep" to meet her students' needs some days, and she felt drained trying to be there for everyone. Ann took pride in knowing that some of her students would come to her with personal problems and they trusted her enough to seek her out. Sometimes students would visit Ann's classroom first thing in the morning for a hug, even though they didn't have Ann's class until later in the day.

Ann understood the need to connect with her students but found the relationships difficult to establish and navigate, as some students were closed off from making

valuable emotional connections. She found fulfillment in knowing she did her best to meet her students where they were. Above all else, Ann understood the need for the students to be heard and understood and the impact of that understanding from a trusted adult reached far beyond the walls of the school. Findings show that students benefit from positive interactions and caring relationships, no matter how close, with their teachers. A simple acknowledgement of a students' hard work could change the course of their day and encourage a student to reach higher toward their goals. Through *being present, understanding, and showing respect* to her students, Ann consistently demonstrated caring acts and was able to establish and maintain caring relationships with many of her students.

Q3 How Do Students Perceive Caring From Their Teachers? Students showed consensus when it came to how they perceived caring from their teachers. Although each received the care differently due to their individually navigated experiences, the students had intersecting ideas of what a caring teacher does and how they perceive caring from their teachers. To the students, caring from teachers was shown by:

- *Understanding*
- *Communicating*
- *Helping*
- *Listening*
- *Being present*
- *Being fair*
- *Showing respect*

### **Review and Preview**

This present chapter navigated the individual experiences of Ann, a middle and high school reading remediation teacher, and her students. All expressed the ways in which they connect with one another through care and relationships within the school

setting. It was found that although the individual experience with care and relationships varied based upon past and current life experience, the common themes of *Understanding, Communicating, Helping, Listening, Being Present, Being Fair, and Showing Respect* were shown as being important for a caring relationship to happen and to be reciprocated by both the teacher and the student. Emergent themes from this research included: *Peer Relationships, Student-Teacher Relationships, Care as Understanding, Care for Success, Care for Respect and Fairness*. The final chapter, *Chapter Five: Discussion* focuses on this research positioned within the educational system, offers implications for stakeholders, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

“Favorable teacher-child relationships contribute to the well-being of both teachers and children” (Spilt & Koomen, 2009, p. 86). It is also established that poor relationships between teachers and students are related to “...low levels of competence and job satisfaction and high levels of teaching stress” (Spilt & Koomen, 2009, p. 86). As care and relationships relate to students, Cooper and Mines (2014) stated, “Student-teacher relationships have a large impact on students’ social and emotional experiences in schools primarily because such relationships influence students’ perceptions of connection and belonging” (p. 264). Unfortunately, as Cooper and Mines (2014) point out, there lacks opportunity for students (specifically high school students) to engage with their teachers in meaningful ways to forge such important relationships. With this research, I sought to fill a gap, as the “extent to which understanding is necessary for students to perceive teacher care and the exact nature of teacher understanding that most effectively supports caring student-teacher relationships has not been examined...” (Cooper & Mines, 2014, p. 265.) The following sections of this current chapter discuss this research as related to the implications for stakeholders, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## **Overview**

Through this research, I sought to explore the intricacies of care and student-teacher relationships within the secondary classroom setting. Qualitative case study methodology was used alongside portraiture to form a portrayed case study, detailing personal accounts of student-teacher relationships. The study followed one (1) teacher, Ann, and seven (7) of Ann's high school students: Anthony, Gus, Hailey, Jafabian, Marcel, Morgan, and Victoria. Personal accounts were documented, and raw interactions were recorded through observations, photographs, and interviews to reveal the whole picture of what it means to care within an educational context and how that caring impacts teachers and the students they serve. The research questions below were used in the design, data collection and analysis and acted as a guide for every facet of this research:

- Q1     What is the nature of caring student-teacher relationships?
- Q2     How do teachers perceive caring student-teacher relationships to impact themselves and their students?
- Q3     How do students perceive caring from their teachers?

## **Findings and Implications**

The findings of this research shed light on how caring relationships are perceived by both teachers and students, how those perceptions differ through individual experience, and they brought forth essential components of care for successful student-teacher relationships. Care, as this research found, has key components that must be present for the student in order for the student to feel as though their teacher cares for them. Further, cultural implications play a role in the experience of care and caring relationships. Perceptions of caring that were found through this research are:

*Understanding, Communicating, Helping, Listening, Being Present, Being Fair, and Showing Respect.* Emergent themes included: *Peer Relationships, Student-Teacher Relationships, Care as Understanding, Care for Success, and Care for Respect and Fairness.* These findings offer important implications for teacher preparation programs, professional development opportunities offered to school leaders and teachers, school administrators, and teachers.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs and Professional Development Opportunities for Practicing Teachers**

The benefits of positive student-teacher relationships have shown to influence long-term student success and are crucial to a students' well-being, self-concept, confidence, and academic success (Bosworth, 1995; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Noddings, 1984, 2005; McFarland, Murray et al., 2016; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Pianta et al., 1995; Quigley & Hall, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011; Teven & McCrosky, 1997). This present research has the potential to influence teacher preparation programs by enhancing instruction on empathy and relationships to better reach the future students of teacher candidates. As Sabol and Pianta (2012) explain, pre-service teacher training may prove to inform teachers on forming high-quality relationships with students. Quigley and Hall (2016) found that teachers are sometimes the primary caregiver for certain students, so those relationships are crucial. It is largely unknown how teacher dispositions influence interaction with students and this research brings forth the need to explore teacher dispositions further. Is care teachable? Can training in empathy help teachers become better communicators and forge stronger relationships with their students?

Findings from this present research revealed that care and relationships are personal experiences, shared by the carer and the cared-for, woven together by common themes. Common themes for caring, as identified through this research, were *Understanding, Communicating, Helping, Listening, Being Present, Being Fair, and Showing Respect*. The potential is great to use the identified themes to create curriculum for teacher candidates to practice and model behaviors that would best aid the formation of healthy, caring student-teacher relationships with their future students. It has not been established through research literature or this present research whether or not the act of caring could be *taught*, however, practicing caring actions using the themes identified through this research may help bring forth the teacher candidates' capacity to facilitate positive, caring relationships with their future students.

Furthermore, similar professional development opportunities could be provided to practicing school administrators and teachers to enhance the socio-emotional culture within the school. Professional development opportunities for practicing teachers could mirror those of the pre-service teacher training. This professional development could be provided in conjunction with existing socio-emotional programming within the school and provide opportunities for teachers to understand the complexities of caring relationships with students. If implemented correctly, teachers could potentially see gains in student motivation and achievement with the enhanced ability to create and maintain caring relationships with their students. Positive student teacher-relationships have previously shown to enhance student social functioning, help to alleviate behavior problems, and may increase learning engagement and motivation in the classroom

(Davis, 2003, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, 2011; Roorda, Koomen, et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011; Teven & McCrosky, 1997; Teven, 2001).

### **School Administrators and Teachers**

School administrators are tasked with ensuring that teachers are performing their jobs efficiently and meeting the needs of students to further the mission of the school and the district. As previous research has established, the needs of students reach far beyond those of academics and in order for students to find success they have an innate need to feel valued and respected (Hughes, 2011). Teachers have a duty to provide a conducive classroom environment for academic and socio-emotional growth, which includes the ability to form and maintain meaningful, caring relationships with their students.

Teachers benefit from positive relationships with students in that they find better job satisfaction and exhibit positive indicators of well-being (Koca, 2016; Spilt, Koomen, et al., 2011; Veldman et al., 2013; Quigley & Hall, 2016). Understanding the basic themes of caring identified through this research is crucial for administrators and teachers. The themes of care include: *Understanding, Communicating, Helping, Listening, Being Present, Being Fair, and Showing Respect*. Further, integrating the themes of care into the daily interactions with students should prove to be beneficial to teachers and the students they serve.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this research include the inclusion of only one teacher participant, a relatively short data collection period, and the research site itself. Originally, my intent was to include three (3) teacher participants and feature students within each of their respective classrooms. Only one (1) teacher at the research site was



willing to participate within this study. Including multiple teachers would have expanded the scope of this research and provided different angles as to the relationship styles of each teacher and differing classroom dynamics. Additionally, including more than one teacher would have opened the door to different students participating within this research, which could have potentially yielded other results. The data collection period for this research was one semester, however, this study would have benefitted from an entire school year of data collection to observe the intricate student-teacher relationships evolve over time. The final limitation to this research includes the research site itself. Being a public charter school, it differs from the local district-run schools in that it is governed by its own board of directors, does not have established zoning lines for student attendance, and is open to any student within the state. Also, given that it is an alternative placement school, the student population is different from that of the surrounding traditional public schools. Students are referred from the school district to attend and some are court-ordered to attend because of past criminal history and/or truancy.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This research focused on the relationships between students and their teacher and sought to uncover the perceptions of teachers and students surrounding care and relationships with one another. While focusing on field observations, interviews, and classroom artifacts to view and understand the perceptions of care and relationships, this research uncovered themes of caring and multiple avenues for teachers to forge relationships with their students. While common themes of care were identified among

participants, the lived experiences and culture of each played a large role in how they internalized and received or rejected the care.

### **Gender and Culture**

This topic would benefit from future research exploring the ways in which student and teacher gender and culture impacts the formation and maintenance of caring relationships. I found that of the seven (7) student participants, the two (2) female students expressed more of a need for *communication* as a form of showing care towards another and also as a means for the student to receive caring from a teacher or a peer. The male students featured in this research did not mention communication as a mean to care. This finding may prove to impact the way teachers approach male and female students, as their needs may be different from one another. Future research in the area of gender differences with care could mirror that of the current research but expand upon it with larger student groups of male and female students within the same school and/or class. Further, cultural concerns and links to caring access within the school environment should be explored to fully understand the impact.

### **Different School Structures**

While this research took place within an alternative placement public charter school, future research could benefit from the use of multiple school sites of traditional public schools. The school sites could be within the same school district and potentially the use of some schools in different regions of the country would be helpful to unpack themes on a larger scale. A traditional public school could involve a different student base that could potentially yield different results. Further, varying grade levels would provide more variety to future research. Including students in grades K-12 may help

depict a more complete overall picture of perceptions of caring in the classroom. It may also unlock the evolution of relationships, by observing students over the course of multiple years. The need and perception of the student to feel cared for by their teacher may change as they grow.

### **Participants**

**Students.** This research would benefit from the use of non-alternatively placed students, those typically attending traditional public schools. Additionally, including other grade levels in future work would be extremely beneficial to see the differences and similarities. These could be separate studies or one large study focusing on elementary through high school to see if their perceptions of caring and relationships are similar.

**Teachers.** Future research should focus on more than one teacher and their individually navigated relationships with their students. As previously mentioned, studying teachers from different grade levels and even separate school campuses could greatly expand the scope of this research vein. Additionally, teachers with different levels of experience could provide interesting results, as previous research has shown that novice teachers establish, perceive and experience relationships with their students differently than more experienced teachers (Claessens, Tartwijk, et al., 2016).

### **Conclusion**

This research focused on the intricate caring relationships between one high school teacher and her students. Understanding how the relationships form, how they are perceived by all parties involved, and how the relationships impact everyone through their daily lives is essential for inciting positive change in how we approach the education process. It is theorized that one cannot meet the academic needs of a child until the

personal needs for care are met (Noddings, 2005). Often, teachers are viewed as primary caregivers within their students' lives and care is an essential piece of the delicate relationships between teachers and students. As Noddings has emphasized, the ethic of care could be used as a vehicle for the advancement of education and to cultivate essential relationships between students and teachers to meet the needs of the whole child (Noddings, 2005).

The theoretical constructs of this research included Noddings' Care Theory (Noddings, 1984, 2005), the Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005), and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Each of these theoretical underpinnings were used to facilitate my research from data collection to analysis. Noddings' Care Theory was the inspiration for this research as it recognizes the essential need for students to have a caring bond with their teacher. Noddings (2005) said, "A teacher exercises the virtue of caring by making students do what is thought to be good for them" (p. xiv). Through this research, I found that the definition of care is fluid from one person to the next and heavily depends on the personal and cultural experiences of an individual. Communication is a large part of the ethics of caring, and while I was not specifically looking for the teaching of the ethics of care within the classroom, I did conclude that communication is a vehicle for care and was viewed by the female students as a primary method for showing and receiving care for someone. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 2005) acknowledges the attachment bonds between a primary caregiver and a child and how disruption of those bonds can impact future relationships between the child and others. Through this research, I found that the student participants had a difficult time forging and maintaining peer relationships, which

is inferred to be linked to past relational experiences with caregivers early in their lives. The Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) relies on three constructs of *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*. Each of the constructs help to facilitate student self-regulation and motivation for learning. The *relatedness* strand of the Self-Determination Theory implies how the teacher connects with students through caring actions. I observed the relatedness strand throughout my data collection and found that students who felt they had a teacher who they could communicate with and rely on had better trust and expressed that they believed the teacher cared for them and their personal success.

Findings of this study revealed a positive influence of care between Ann and her students. The individual navigation of relationships for the students involved depended heavily on past experience and some students were reluctant to connect with adults. They each shared with me how they care for others and how they best receive care from others. Perceptions of caring that were found through this research are: *Understanding*, *Communicating*, *Helping*, *Listening*, *Being Present*, *Being Fair*, and *Showing Respect*. Emergent themes included: *Peer Relationships*, *Student-Teacher Relationships*, *Care as Understanding*, *Care for Success*, and *Care for Respect and Fairness*. While caring for another and receiving care is an individual experience, the themes identified through this research can be used to best prepare teachers to meet the individual social-emotional needs of their students through caring practice.

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**APPENDIX A**

**STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP SCALE AND MODIFIED TEACHER**

**WELL-BEING SCALE**

## APPENDIX A

## Student-Teacher Relationship Scale

**STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP SCALE – SHORT FORM****Robert C. Pianta**

Child: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please reflect on the degree to which each of the following statements currently applies to your relationship with this child. Using the scale below, circle the appropriate number for each item.*

Definitely does not apply 1	Not really 2	Neutral, not sure 3	Applies somewhat 4	Definitely applies 5
-----------------------------------	--------------------	---------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------

1.	I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	If upset, this child will seek comfort from me.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	This child values his/her relationship with me.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	When I praise this child, he/she beams with pride.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	This child easily becomes angry with me.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	This child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Dealing with this child drains my energy	1	2	3	4	5
12.	When this child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	This child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	This child is sneaky or manipulative with me.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me.	1	2	3	4	5

### SECTION A. Teacher/Care Provider Relationship With the Child

Below is a series of statements about your relationship with this child. For each statement, please circle the number of the category that most applies to your relationship with him/her.

	Definitely Does Not Apply	Not Really	Neutral, Not Sure	Applies Sometimes	Definitely Applies
1. I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child .....	CL 1	2	3	4	5
2. This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
3. If upset, this child will seek comfort from me .....	CL 1	2	3	4	5
4. I his child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
5. This child values his/her relationship with me .....	CL 1	2	3	4	5
6. When I praise this child, he/she beams with pride .....	CL 1	2	3	4	5
7. This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself .....	CL 1	2	3	4	5
8. This child easily becomes angry at me .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
9. It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling .....	CL 1	2	3	4	5
10. This child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
11. Dealing with this child drains my energy .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
12. When this child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
13. This child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
14. This child is sneaky or manipulative with me .....	CO 1	2	3	4	5
15. This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me .....	CL 1	2	3	4	5

CL = CLOSENESS  
CO = CONFLICT

Page 1: modified STRS - SF instructions and items for use in Pennsylvania Head Start Staff Wellness Survey

Page 2: original STRS instrument

### YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM

Please reflect on how much each of the statements below currently applies to your relationship with the children in your classroom. All relationships are individual, but in responding, please think about your relationships with the children in your classroom in general. Use the scale below to choose the appropriate response for each item.				
Definitely does not apply 1	Not really 2	Neutral, not sure 3	Applies somewhat 4	Definitely applies 5
1.	I share an affectionate, warm relationship with the children.			
2.	The children and I always seem to be struggling with each other.			
3.	If upset, the children will seek comfort from me.			
4.	The children are uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me.			
5.	The children value their relationship with me.			
6.	When I praise the children, they beam with pride.			
7.	The children share information with me about themselves even if I don't ask.			
8.	The children easily become angry with me.			
9.	It is easy to be in tune with what the children are feeling.			
10.	The children remain angry or are resistant after being disciplined.			
11.	Dealing with the children drains my energy.			
12.	When the children are in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day.			
13.	The children's feelings toward me can be hard to predict or can change suddenly.			
14.	The children are sneaky or manipulative with me.			
15.	The children openly share their feelings and experiences with me.			

Citation: Whitaker, R. C., Dearth-Wesley, T., & Gooze, R. A. (2015). Workplace stress and the quality of teacher–children relationships in Head Start. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 30, 57-69. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.08.008>



**APPENDIX B**

**RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR TEACHERS**

## APPENDIX B

## Recruitment Letter for Teachers



Hello,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Colorado currently working on my dissertation entitled *The Influence of Care: An Exploration of Student and Teacher Experiences*. My research focuses on the perceptions and practices of caring relationships between students and teachers and how those relationships impact students, teachers, and the educational environment as a whole. This research will benefit from a small number of participants to best capture the intricate relationships, while respecting the beauty of the raw classroom experiences of all participants.

If you choose to become a teacher participant within this research, your commitment would involve: (a) attending *at least* two in-person interview sessions for approximately one hour each; (b) allowing me access to classroom artifacts including, but not limited to: lesson plans, anonymous student work samples, teacher-created assignments/assessments, etc. (c) allowing videotaping and photographing of classroom activities involving student and teacher interactions and (d) welcoming me into your classroom as a non-distracting observer multiple times per week over a period of three months. \*Please note that you may opt out of the photo and video portion if you choose. Also, anonymous artifacts will remain in the classroom and will be approved by you for use within this research. You will be rewarded with a \$50 gift card for your participation within this research. Your real name will not be used in the published results unless you authorize permission to do so. Participation in this research is voluntary and in no way influences your employment. Please feel free call, email, or text me with any questions or concerns about this research (my contact information is listed below.) If you are interested in becoming a participant, please email your name and current grade level to [rade1501@bears.unco.edu](mailto:rade1501@bears.unco.edu) by [August 30, 2019](#). I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Allison Schnell  
Doctoral Candidate University of Northern Colorado  
[rade1501@bears.unco.edu](mailto:rade1501@bears.unco.edu)  
850-499-1863

**APPENDIX C**  
**RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR STUDENTS**

## APPENDIX C

## Recruitment Letter for Student Participants



Hello,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Colorado currently working on my dissertation entitled *The Influence of Care: An Exploration of Student and Teacher Experiences*. My research focuses on the perceptions and practices of caring relationships between students and teachers and how those relationships impact students, teachers, and the educational environment as a whole. This research has the potential to inform instructional practices of teachers and frame the way in which teachers care for their students.

On a personal level, I am the mother of two children and a former elementary teacher. I am currently certified to teach grades K-6 and licensed as a school administrator within the state of Florida.

You are receiving this letter because your child's teacher has elected to participate in my research as a teacher participant. Please consider allowing your child to participate.

This research will benefit from a small number of participants to best capture the intricate relationships, while respecting the beauty of the raw classroom experiences of all participants.

If you choose to allow your child to become a student participant within this research, your child's commitment would involve: (a) attending one in-person focus group interview session for approximately 30 (thirty) minutes with other student participants; (b) regular observations of the classroom environment, including student participants (c) agreeing to allow access to artifacts such as student work completed in the classroom, as approved by the classroom teacher (d) allowing videotaping of classroom activities involving student and teacher interactions. Please know that you may opt out of the photo and video portion if you choose.

Your child's real name will not be used in the published results. Participation in this research is voluntary and in no way influences your child's student status.

Please feel free call, email, or text me with any questions or concerns about this research (my contact information is listed below.)

If you are interested in allowing your child to assist in my dissertation research along with their teacher, please sign the attached consent form and have your child sign the attached assent form. Email the completed forms to [rade1501@bears.unco.edu](mailto:rade1501@bears.unco.edu) or [deliver to your child's teacher by September 20, 2019](#). I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Allison Schnell  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Northern Colorado  
[rade1501@bears.unco.edu](mailto:rade1501@bears.unco.edu)

**APPENDIX D****CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANTS**

## APPENDIX D

## Consent Form for Teacher Participants



**Informed Consent for Participation in Research**  
University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: The Influence of Care: An Exploration of Student and Teacher Experiences

Researcher: Allison Schnell  
Phone Number: 850-499-1863  
Email: [rade1501@bears.unco.edu](mailto:rade1501@bears.unco.edu)

Research Advisor: Dr. Jenni Harding  
Phone: 970-351-1029  
Email: [Jenni.Harding@unco.edu](mailto:Jenni.Harding@unco.edu)

Dear Participant,

I am conducting research to better understand teacher and student perceptions and practices of care and relationships within the classroom. If you grant permission, as a teacher participant, you will be involved in:

- Completing a survey/scale that assesses student-teacher relationships
  - Attending *at least* two in-person interviews lasting approximately one (1) hour each. *At least* one of these interviews may be conducted as a small focus group with other teacher participants. More interviews may be scheduled as clarification is needed. Any of the interviews may be conducted electronically through email, phone, or video conferencing software.
- Questions will involve the following topics: (a) Your background in education and details about your current classroom and teaching style, (b) your perceptions of care within the classroom, and (c) your beliefs and practices of care and how your beliefs and practices relate to your identity as a teacher and influence your students' experiences. You will also be asked questions about your relationships with specific student participants who have also elected to participate in this research.
- Routine classroom observations, approximately once or twice per week over the course of five months, will last *at least* two hours each.



- Granting permission for access to artifacts. Artifacts may include, but are not limited to photographs and video of the classroom environment, student work samples, teacher-created assessment pieces, lesson plans, etc.
- Allowing videotaping and photographing of classroom activities, specifically focusing on interactions between teacher and students (You can opt out of this portion if you choose.)

\*You must be at least 18 years old to be a teacher participant in this research.

#### Costs and Compensation

You will be awarded a \$50 gift card for participation in this study. Potential costs associated with this research include potentially staying after school hours to attend the interview sessions, although we will work together to find a convenient time- even during the school day if that's best for you.

By initialing and signing below, you are **agreeing to participate in a research study**. I will keep all records private and will not divulge any information about these records except to report group summaries in my final dissertation. Your real name will not be listed, as pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process. Please initial below to indicate that you have read and understood this explanation:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials

I foresee no risks to subjects. I will use an electronic recording device to capture conversations and video and/or photographs may be used to document the classroom environment. Although all information will be kept in an encrypted, password-protected online cloud storage system, there is a possibility that information can be stolen electronically. Finally, any paperwork (such as this consent form) which is associated with this research will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my home. For your participation, a copy of the final research report will be given to you at your request.

Agreeing or refusing to be in this study will not impact your employment or student status. During the research process, you will be able to decide if you wish to continue in this research, and you have the right to end your participation in this research without any consequences.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this research.

Thank you for assisting me with my dissertation research!

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

Participation in this research is voluntary and not for monetary compensation. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

---

Participant PRINT NAME

---

Participant SIGNATURE

Date

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

---

Researcher SIGNATURE

Date

If you give permission for the researcher to use your situation with a fictitious name and removing all other identifiers as an example in the research reports, please initial here:

---

Initials

If you give permission for the researcher to take photos and videos of yourself within the classroom environment, please check YES below. If you DO NOT consent to photos and videos of yourself to be taken, please check NO below.

[ \_\_\_\_ ] YES

[ \_\_\_\_ ] NO

**APPENDIX E**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS**

## APPENDIX E

## Consent Form for Parents



**Informed Consent for Participation in Research**  
University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: The Influence of Care: An Exploration of Student and Teacher Experiences

Researcher: Allison Schnell  
Phone Number: 850-499-1863  
Email: [rade1501@bears.unco.edu](mailto:rade1501@bears.unco.edu)

Research Advisor: Dr. Jenni Harding  
Phone: 970-351-1029  
Email: [Jenni.Harding@unco.edu](mailto:Jenni.Harding@unco.edu)

Dear Parent(s) and Student Participant,

I am conducting research to better understand teacher and student perceptions and practices of care and relationships within the classroom.

You are receiving this letter because your child's teacher has elected to participate in the research. If you grant permission for your child to participate in this research along with their teacher, your child will be involved in:

- Attending *at least* one in-person interview lasting approximately thirty (30) minutes. The student interview will be conducted as a small focus group with other student participants and will be supervised by a teacher employed by the school. Interviews may be videotaped and/or audio recorded for accuracy.  
\*Please note that you may opt out of the video and photo portion if you choose.
- Routine classroom observations approximately once or twice per week over the course of three months.
- As the researcher, I will gain access to artifacts such as student work samples and photographs and/or video of the classroom to inform my research. All access to artifacts will be approved and provided by the participating teacher.

There will be no compensation given to participants for participation in this study. Potential costs associated with this research *may* include missed instructional time for

students to attend the focus group interview session. Parents and students will be notified in advance of the day/time for the focus group interview session and all efforts will be made to avoid missed instructional time.

By initialing and signing below, you are **agreeing to allow your child to participate in this research study**. I will keep all records private and will not divulge any information about these records except to report group summaries in my final dissertation. Your child's real name will not be listed, as pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process to protect privacy. Please initial below to indicate that you have read and understood this explanation:

---

Initials

I foresee no risks to participants. I will use an electronic recording device to capture conversations and video and/or photographs may be used to document the classroom environment. Although all information will be kept in an encrypted, password-protected online cloud storage system, there is a possibility that information can be stolen electronically. Finally, any paperwork (such as this consent form) which is associated with this research will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my home. For your participation, a copy of the final research report will be given to you at your request.

Agreeing or refusing to be in this study will not impact your child's student status. During the research process, you will be able to decide if you wish for your child to continue in this research, and you have the right to end your child's participation in this research without any consequences. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this research.

Thank you for assisting me with my dissertation research!

Sincerely,

---

Participation in this research is voluntary and not for monetary compensation. You and/or your child may decide not to participate in this study and if your child begins participation they may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your and/or your child's decision will be respected. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you consent for your child to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your child's selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

---

 Parent PRINT NAME

---

 Parent SIGNATURE

---

 Date

---

 PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

---

 Student PRINT NAME

---

 Researcher SIGNATURE

---

 Date

If you give permission for the researcher to use your child's situation with a fictitious name and removing all other identifiers as an example in the research reports, please initial here:

---

 Initials

If you give permission for the researcher to take photos and videos of your child within the classroom environment, please check YES below. If you DO NOT consent to photos and videos of your child to be taken, please check NO below.

[ \_\_\_\_ ] YES

[ \_\_\_\_ ] NO

**APPENDIX F**  
**ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS (MINORS)**

## APPENDIX F

## Assent Form for Student Participants



**Informed Consent for Participation in Research**  
University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: The Influence of Care: An Exploration of Student and Teacher Experiences

Hi!

My name is Mrs. Schnell and I'm a student at the University of Northern Colorado. I do research on the relationships between teachers and students. That means I study the way students and teachers work together in the classroom. Your teacher has volunteered to work with me so I can understand how teachers care for their students.

I would like to also ask students about their feelings about school and the relationships they have with their teachers. If you want, you can be one of the kids I talk with. I will be in your classroom at least once per week to watch how your teacher does things to help students like yourself. If you agree to help me, I will look at some of your schoolwork, take pictures of your classroom that may include you in the picture, and take video each time I visit the classroom to help my research.

If you choose to help me, you may:

1. Participate in ONE group interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to one hour (may be video and/or audio recorded.)
2. Allow me to include you in pictures and/or video in the classroom (You can say NO if you choose.)
3. Allow me to see some of your artwork and other school assignments.



If you say yes, I'll ask you about the things your teacher does that are special to you. I will also ask you about how you show others you care for them. This isn't a test or anything like that. There are no right or wrong answers, there won't be any score or grade for your answers, and your teacher will never see or hear your answers. I will write down what you say, but I won't even write down your name. It will take about 30 minutes for you to answer my questions and you will be with other friends from school who are also helping me with my research. I'll ask your teacher for the best time to talk with you so that you don't miss anything too important. Talking with me probably won't help you or hurt you. Your parents have said it's okay for you to talk with me, but you don't have to. It's up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you can stop any time you want.

It is all right to say YES or to say NO. Nothing is going to happen with your grades, and no one will be mad at you if you say no. If you have any questions, ask your parents or your teacher.

If you say YES mark YES in the space below.

[    ] YES

If you say NO mark NO in the space below.

[    ] NO

If you are ok with me taking pictures and video of you during my research, mark YES below. If you are NOT OK with me taking pictures and video of you during my research, mark NO below.

[    ] YES

[    ] NO

WRITE YOUR NAME BELOW:

---

Name

---

Date

---

Researcher SIGNATURE

---

Date

Was form explained verbally and not read by the participant? (circle one)

Yes

No

**APPENDIX G**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

## APPENDIX G

### Interview Protocol for Teachers and Students

#### Teacher Interviews

*Thank you for electing to participate in my research. I will record this interview session using digital transcription software. Do you consent to being recorded? \*pause for answer\**

*\*Begin recording\* I am here with (participant name/pseudonym) on (date).*

*Your contribution to this research will help enhance the understanding of care and relationships in the classroom and their impact on students, teachers, and the classroom as whole. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me? \*Pause for answer\* To begin, I will ask you general questions about yourself and then move onto more specific questions about your perceptions and practices of caring and relationships.*

#### Background

1. How long have you been in education (how many years total)?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. What grade level do you currently teach? Which grade levels have you taught in the past?
4. Which subjects do you teach? Which is your favorite/least favorite?
5. What made you decide to become a teacher?
6. Tell me about the school community.
7. What is your favorite part of your job?
8. What is your least favorite part of your job?

**Perceptions**

1. How do you define caring (in general and specifically in education)?
2. In your opinion, is it possible to teach someone to care?
3. What does a *caring* classroom look like?
4. What does an *uncaring* classroom look like?
5. Describe characteristics of a *caring* teacher.
6. Describe characteristics of an *uncaring* teacher.
7. Do you consider yourself to be a caring teacher?
8. Describe a caring relationship between a student and a teacher. What would it look like? This can be a real example from your experience or fictitious.
9. Do you believe caring relationships between teachers and students are important factors for student success? Explain why or why not.
10. How do your students show that they care about you and/or the classroom?
11. How do your students show that they care about their peers?

**Practices**

1. Tell me about your own schooling experiences as a child. Did you have any teachers who you perceived to be *uncaring* or *caring*? How did those relationships impact you in school and personally (academically, socially, and/or emotionally)?
2. Did your own schooling experiences have an impact on the kind of teacher you are? Describe.
3. How do you establish a caring classroom environment?
4. How do you model care within the classroom?

5. How do you maintain a caring classroom environment throughout the school year?
6. How do you show your students that you care about them, in general?
7. Give me an example of one student you have built a positive, caring relationship with (no names, of course.) Tell me about that relationship.
8. Give me an example of a student who seems hard to reach, or one with whom you may have a difficult relationship with (no names, of course.)
  - a. What have you done to try to reach that child?
  - b. Tell me about them and why you believe it has been a struggle to form a caring relationship with that student.
9. Tell me how you work with students who display behavioral issues.
10. Describe how you help students who are rejected by their peers.
11. How can a caring relationship with a teacher help students who may struggle either academically or socially?

*Before we wrap up today, is there anything else you would like to share with me?*

*\*Pause\**

*Thank you for your time!*

### **Student Interviews**

Morrison (2013) says:

In situations in which the potential is high for young children to feel constrained, nervous or uncomfortable in a research interview, the onus is on the adult to turn a potentially constraining and uncomfortable situation

into a productive, enjoyable and mutually fruitful encounter, so that the children leave the situation more positive than they were at its start (p. 334).

Morrison's words guide my interview protocol for working with the most vulnerable participants, the students.

### **Introduction**

*Thank you for participating in my research. I am going to ask you questions about your feelings about school. Everything you say today will be for me only and your teacher will not find out what you say during our time together, so it is important to answer truthfully! Also, there are no right or wrong answers.*

***\*This interview session is being recorded and will only be heard by me.***

*Do you have any questions for me before we get started?*

### **Questions**

1. First, please tell me your name and grade level.
2. Would you like for me to use your real name (first name only) in my research or would you prefer I use a pseudonym? A pseudonym is a fictitious name.
3. Can you tell me about a past school experience you had with a teacher (good or bad)? How did that make you feel?
4. How long you have been at the Academy and why did you come to this school?
5. As you know, my research is about care and relationships in the classroom. In your own words, please tell me in your own words what it means to care about someone else (please give examples from your personal life.)
6. How do you show your family that you care about them?

7. How do you show your friends that you care about them? (this can look different than how you show your family.)
8. What does a *caring* teacher act like?
9. What does an *uncaring* teacher act like?
10. What does a *caring* school (the classroom, etc.) look like?
11. What does an *uncaring* school (the classroom, etc.) look like?
12. Think about your past school experiences (here or other schools you have attended.) Do you have a favorite teacher? Tell me about that teacher and why you consider them to be your favorite.
13. Do you think your teacher (Ms. Black) cares about you? Why or why not? How does she show that she cares about you and other students?
14. Do you think your other teachers care about you? Give examples of how they show they care (this can be current teachers, or teachers you have had in the past.)
15. Finish my sentence: If a student is sad/mad/frustrated, my teacher (Ms. Black) does this: \_\_\_\_\_.
16. My teacher makes me feel safe in my classroom. Yes/No. Example? Do you feel safe at school? Yes/No. Example?
17. When I do something good, my teacher rewards me with \_\_\_\_\_.
18. When someone in my class acts up, my teacher \_\_\_\_\_.
19. My favorite thing about my teacher (Ms. Black) is \_\_\_\_\_.
20. My least favorite thing about my teacher (Ms. Black) is \_\_\_\_\_.

*Is there anything else anyone would like to share with me today? \*Pause\**



*Please know that if you have questions for me or would like to share anything else, you are welcome to share with me when I visit your classroom.*

**APPENDIX H**  
**DISSERTATION TIMELINE**

[illegible]

**APPENDIX I**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

## APPENDIX I

### Institutional Review Board Approval



#### *Institutional Review Board*

DATE: August 27, 2019

TO: Allison Schnell

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1290710-3] THE INFLUENCE OF CARE: AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENT AND TEACHER EXPERIENCES

SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: August 27, 2019

EXPIRATION DATE: \*see note in bold below\*

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report and Modification/Amendment materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

**Under the recently revised Common Rule, this project will not require annual continuing review by the committee. Your project has been assigned a "Next Report Due" date of August 27, 2022. Just prior to that date, the IRB will check in with you to get a current status of your project. This will help us determine if your project needs to be extended or if your study is ready to be closed. If you have completed your project prior to that date, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs to complete a closing report.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.